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SHAKESPEARE.

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SHAKESPEARE

COMMENTARIES

BY

DR. G. G. GERVINUS

PROFESSOR AT HEIDELBERG.

TRANSLATED

UNDER THE AUTHOR'S SUPERINTENDENCE

BY

F. E. BUNNETT,

AUTHOR OF "LOUISE JULIANE, ELECTRESS PALATINE AND HER TIMES", ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOLUME I.

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PREFACE.

WITHOUT undervaluing in the least degree the laborious researches of those English critics, who by careful collation of manuscripts, archæological research, and historical investigation, have restored and illustrated the text of Shakespeare, it may be safely attested, that it is to Germany that we owe, if not the founders, yet the most able and systematic among the disciples of that school of Shakespearian critics, who have illustrated rather his thought than his language, his matter than his manner; who have studied his writings rather as those of a moralist, a thinker, a master of human nature, and a poet of all places and of all time, than as those of an English writer of a certain epoch. The labours of what may be not unfairly called the English school of Shakespearian critics are invaluable, for without them, the language in which the moralist and the poet has spoken, would have been often

his own country, and standing thus alone in the path he has taken, his work will be a welcome addition to English Literature. His History of German Poetry and his History of the Nineteenth Century have already given his name a world-wide reputation, and have placed him in the highest rank as a critic of art, and as a philosophical historian.

It only remains for me to add that I have undertaken this work with the author's sanction and under his supervision. It has led me more and more deeply to appreciate the views it unfolds, and the personal advantage and enjoyment I have derived from their consideration, will I trust be shared by many readers.

October 1862.

F. E. Bunnett.

PREFACE

OF THE GERMAN AUTHOR.

THE delineation of the great British poet, which I now publish, sprung from a series of happy hours in which for many years I made Shakespeare's works a subject of continual reflection, and drew the purest enjoyment from their elucidation.

After the completion of my History of German Poetry, I was desirous to return to the long forsaken field of political history, my original purpose. My intention was, and it is so still, to follow up the conclusion of that historical record of our literature, by venturing to undertake the history of our time, to exhibit to the German people as in a mirror the picture of the present, to hold before them their dishonour, their vocation, and their hopes, to point out to them "the very age and body" of this time, a period which more and more promised to become a great and important one and to reward the trouble of the historical observer. Since then, events have corresponded to this expectation; they hold out to the historian a still more alluring task, and at the same time open to him a more instructive school.

They have drawn me also for a while from my post of observation into the whirlpool of active life, a labyrinth from which, whatever appearances may say to the contrary, there is for the present no prospect of a satisfactory and definitive issue.

Amid these agitations of political life, in the midst of investigations into the base motives of the historical world, I wanted a place of self-collectedness and composure, and felt the necessity for raising the soul above the low ground of reality, a necessity which could not be disregarded.

The last period of our civilization and history explains sufficiently, why we are all so habituated in Germany to feel the fine arts and their gifts as a necessity. But the present calls us as it were from these dear and cherished habits to the field of active life, which can be won by no half efforts and which claims our united powers. Divided between these striving necessities and demands, how may we satisfy both, without injuring either?

The demands of the country, the duties of the day, the active vocations of life are uncompromising; these must first be satisfied; enjoyment, intellectual ease must accommodate themselves to them. But the enjoyments of the mind may themselves be of such a kind, as to become a spur to our working activity and efficiency, if they are so chosen, that they keep our ideas healthy and do not over-refine our perceptions, that with mind and imagination they engage also the practical understanding, and influence the force of the will. The works of the

Muses which possess this property in a higher degree are altogether few; but these few rank among the first and greatest.

In the intellectual history of England and Germany, there are two men, the one born in this, the other in that land, who maintained in these later centuries the old germanic kindred and fellowship, the possession of whom the two nations share, and for the higher appreciation of whom they mutually strive. The equal part which they took in the most practical and the most eminently intellectual people, places these mediators between two nations prominently in that middle position, where they reconcile and unite contradictory qualities, and in this union lies a sure pledge of human greatness. A like interesting picture the whole mental history of humanity perhaps never again presents! These men and their relation to the two nations have ever therefore given me much to think of and admire; they are drawn closer to me at the present time, when their works are especially suitable to our peculiar condition.

England has naturalized our Handel and reckoned him as her own; in lasting tradition amid all corruptions of prevailing tastes, she has cherished his pure melody, and gratefully preserved his memory; she has gathered material for his life and collected his works in an edition worthy of them. To him, a Luther in overflowing fulness, in strong and violent character, in protestant-religious depth, in wide sway over the inner world of feeling and in wonderful power of utterance, to him must we repair, if we

would flee away from the errors of the musical path in a dull and distracted age ; for in him alone among those of later date can we understand, what the ancients have said of the vigorous Doric art as a moral means of culture and of its ennobling and strengthening influence upon the character and will of man. Upon him have the English bestowed the more just estimation ; he has remained their national favourite among musicians, although in natural and musical character no truer German could be found, although his art is intrinsically interwoven with the history of our poetry and its highest qualities. But of this perhaps another time.

To the Shakespeare of England *we* gladly boast of having done the greater justice ; certain it is that through industry and love, as England did with our Handel, we have won the great poet for ourselves, though England has not suffered herself to be robbed of him in the same manner as we had been of Handel. If we look for intellectual enjoyment, which on that cross-way between active and contemplative life can in itself afford us the highest satisfaction, without enervating us for the duties of outward action, there is no richer source than this poet, who with the magic of imagination fascinates enthusiastic youth and its ideals, while with the thoughtfulness and ripeness of his judgment he offers inexhaustible food to the mature mind ; who hardens and sharpens the feeling for actual and active life in its widest extent, but at the same time rises far above its barriers to the contemplation of eternal blessings ; who teaches

at once to love and to disregard the world, to command it and to renounce it. With these qualities Shakespeare has robbed us of delight in much other poetry, because for all that we relinquish he indemnifies us a hundred-fold. Even in our own great poets, our Goethe and Schiller, he has made us doubt; and it is well known that in a new school in Germany there prevails a belief in a future second German Shakespeare, who will found a greater dramatic art, than the two poets we have named. Until he comes, until this belief has become active enough to displace Shakespeare, it can be of no damage but rather profit in our present position, (on the threshold of a new political life, in want of a practical mental culture, at all events, if this direction of taste continue and extend,) if we attempt anew, to naturalize the old Shakespeare among us more and more, even at the risk of placing our own poets still further in the shade. Of the same benefit would it be to our intellectual life, if his famed contemporary Bacon were revived in a suitable manner, in order to counterbalance the idealistic philosophy of Germany. For both, poet and philosopher, who have looked deeply into the history and politics of their people, stand upon the level ground of reality, notwithstanding the high art of the one and the speculative notions of the other. By the healthfulness of their own mind they influence the healthfulness of others, while in their most ideal and most abstract representations they aim at a preparation for life, *as it is*, for *that* life, in which exclusively the works of policy

are concerned. Our poetry, now romantic and fantastic, now homely and domestic, and our spiritual philosophy failed in this; and we should well weigh, whether that is the school qualified, to prepare us for the vocation, towards which we strive so eagerly. In England, in the land of political supremacy, it would not thus be acknowledged. For no one will be full enough of delusion and folly, to think, that the poet and philosopher thus qualified, have been cast by chance among this people thus conditioned! *One* national spirit, the same practical hearty sense of life, which has created this state and this popular freedom, has also fashioned that poetry so full of life, and that philosophy so rich in experience. And the more decidedly *we* acquire and cultivate feeling and delight in such productions of the mind, the more decidedly shall we ripen towards a capacity for fashioning our active life into conformity with that which those departed forefathers have exhibited to all the world for imitation.

This book will lead to the study of the poet of which it treats. Let it then be read, not cursorily nor in parts, but connectedly and as a whole, and always with the poet at hand. Much would otherwise remain obscure, much appear fanciful, much would seem imputed to the poet, whilst my simple endeavour has been to allow him as much as possible to explain himself. The results of my reflections, however unsought, will on some points offer nothing new, on others, will surprise many. Thus we need no longer prove to most readers the poetical beauty, the intel-

lectual superiority of Shakespeare's works; on the other hand, the splendid moral grandeur of the poet remained in many parts concealed to us by the externals of form and style. When first the veil that shrouds him is removed, we perceive, in this moral respect also, a greatness in this man, which rivals every other point in him, but which will strike many as singular in this age, in which one is accustomed to consider mental greatness inseparable from free-thinking and immorality.

The criticising severity of my literary judgments and my discouraging reception of the poetical attempts of our day have often met with reproof. It pleases me to have here an opportunity of showing that I can also praise and love. And if praise and love are more suitable than blame to strengthen and animate our struggling literature, then certainly must the picture, which I sketch here, apply the goad of emulation to every gifted soul. For the work is performed with persevering love, the subject is chosen with exclusive love, every learned apparatus has been expressly kept aloof, in order to rivet the eye of the beholder upon this one object of admiration.

This estimation of the British poet is on the whole a necessary completion to my History of German Poetry. For Shakespeare, from his diffusion and influence, has become a German poet, almost more than any of our native ones. But apart from this importance of Shakespeare upon our own poetic culture, that work upon German poetry was designed by me, whilst I kept my eye steadily fixed upon

the highest aims of all poetic art, and amongst them upon Shakespeare's writings. This made my verdicts severe, because having before me this highest example, partial dissatisfaction even at the greatest works of our first native poets could not be wholly concealed. Perhaps many may now be more reconciled with those verdicts, when the standard of measurement has been here made more apparent. Perhaps too from the radical difference of the two works, we may learn better to recognize the difference between the historical and æsthetic criticism of poetical productions.

The gain, which I myself have drawn from these considerations upon Shakespeare, appears to me immeasurable. It may seem, as if little that is original is accomplished, by placing oneself merely as judge and interpreter of another. But when this judgment is exercised upon a great man, whose art in its power and extent fathoms all things, whose own wisdom besides lies not before us as direct tradition, but requires a particular operation of the mind to purify it from the elements of poetic characterization, then this occupation possesses all the benefits which a practical knowledge and study of man, attempted by the greatest concentration upon the worthiest subjects, can offer; its advantage as well as its enjoyment can scarcely be placed in comparison with that of any other work, and it arouses all the energy of the inner self-active life.

Heidelberg. 1849—50.

G.

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Errata.

Page 24, line 12, *for* 'philosophical', *read* 'philological'.

INTRODUCTION.

THERE are in the present day a number of writings upon literature and men of letters, which, undertaken in consequence of some chance impulse, are treated with passing interest, are received as superficial novelties, and read with transient curiosity.

Not so would I wish myself or others to estimate these reflections on Shakespeare. I cannot desire to offer them as a trifling recreation, for they treat of one of the richest and most important subjects, which could be chosen.

For these reflections concern a man who by nature was so lavishly endowed, that even there where the standard by which to estimate him was most wanting (as among the critics of the Romanic nations), an innate genius within him was ever anticipated, and they admired in him a spirit unconscious of itself; while those who understood how to penetrate into his works with an unprejudiced mind agreed more and more in the slowly acquired conviction, that, in whatever branch of knowledge it might be, no age or nation could easily exhibit a second, in whom the riches of genius, natural endowments, original talent, and versatility of power, were so great as in him.

And what is still more, these reflections concern a man who made the freest use of these liberal gifts of nature. Shakespeare was filled with the conviction and uttered it in various expressions, that nature has *given* nothing to man, but has only *lent*, that she only gives him, that he should give again. He had the experience, that it is not enough in the life of a striving man, to have once entered the path of honour, but that it is important ever undeviatingly to persevere in its track. And he followed out this conviction with the most untiring effort, whilst from the beginning to the end of his public career he displayed an activity which to us Germans especially, who have seen a Goethe and a Schiller (no insignificant men, indeed), struggling in toilsome work, appears wholly unintelligible.

These reflections concern a man, whose poetical superiority is felt by all, even by those incapable of accounting for it; whilst the intelligent judge who is most thoroughly conversant with him and can view him in his relations to the history of poetry in its full extent, sees him stand in the centre of modern dramatic literature in the place which Homer occupies in the history of epic poetry, as the revealing genius of this branch of art, as one whose course and example can never with impunity be forsaken.

These reflections finally concern a man whose entire merit cannot be measured by his poetic greatness alone. His works have been often called a secular Bible; Johnson has said that from his representations a hermit might learn to estimate the affairs of the world; how often too has it been repeated, that in his poems the world and human nature can be seen as in a mirror! These are no exaggerated expressions, but reasonable, well-founded opinions. Human nature is not

merely presented as in the ancient drama, in its typical characters, in his poetical creations it is portrayed in distinct individualized forms; in all circumstances we look within upon the inner life of the man, in the dealings of all classes and conditions, in all kinds of family and private life, in all phases of public history. We are introduced into the life of the Roman aristocracy, republic and monarchy, into the mythic heroic age of the first inhabitants of Gaul and Britain, into the adventurous world of the romantic period of chivalry and the middle ages, upon the soil of English history of mediæval and modern date. Upon all these epochs, upon all these manifold circumstances, the poet looks from a superior point of view, so exalted above prejudice and party, above people and age, with such a soundness and certainty of judgment in matters of art, custom, politics, and religion, that he appears to belong to a later and riper generation; he displays in all common or peculiar conditions of the inner and outer life, a wisdom and a knowledge of human nature, which constitutes him a teacher of unquestionable authority; he has so derived his views of morality from a rich observation of the outer world, and so refined them by a rich inner life, that he deserves more than perhaps any other, to be trustfully chosen as a guide through our worldly course.

To be engaged earnestly and eagerly with such a man, rewards every trouble and demands every effort. If we speak of poetry, the general reader thinks only of the highly-wrought productions of the day, and of the worthless novels which fill up tedious hours, and satisfy the necessity created and made habitual by our over-abundant literature. No thoughtful man can take pleasure in this mental craving;

there is on the contrary an old and excellent rule, that for self-culture little of the good should be read, but that again and again. In no case will the application of this rule be so richly rewarded, as in the study of Shakespeare. For he is ever new, and he cannot satiate. Not only he *may*, but he *must* be often read, and read with the accuracy, with which we are accustomed at school to read the old classics; otherwise one seizes not even the outer shell, much less the inner kernel. Every younger reader of Shakespeare will have made the experience, that the mere subject of his plays, the plot, the action, even during the reading, is only with effort fully apprehended, that soon, after one or even many readings, it is again wholly forgotten. As long as it stands thus with Shakespeare's plays, they have not been understood; to approach him closer, demands honest industry and earnest endeavour.

Such is not only the experience of every single man, but of the whole world. For two hundred and fifty years have men toiled over this poet; they have not grown weary, digging in his works as in a mine, to bring to light all the noble metal, they contain; and those who were most active, were humble enough at last to declare, that scarcely a single passage of this rich mine was yet exhausted. And almost two centuries of this time had passed away, before the men appeared, who first recognized Shakespeare's entire merit and capacity, and divested his pure noble form of the confusion of prejudices, which had veiled and disfigured it.

How was it, that this poet should so long remain an enigma to the whole literary world and history? that so extraordinary a man should be so tardily appreciated, and

even yet by many be so imperfectly understood, — a poet who was in no wise indistinct concerning himself, and whom indeed many of his contemporaries seem to have fully valued?

To these questions there lies one answer in the character of his works themselves, and this answer will be obvious to us of itself at the conclusion of these reflections: the cause of the tardy appreciation of our Poet lies before all in this, that he is an extraordinary man; the ordinary alone is comprehended quickly, the common-place only is free from misconception.

But another answer to the question lies in history. And out of her records will I mention in these introductory remarks the not unknown circumstances which caused a great spirit like this, whose mental energy had been so justly esteemed, to be so completely forgotten; I will then point out in what manner and through whose merits he was by degrees rescued from this oblivion; and in conclusion I will state in what relation this present work stands to similar past ones, which undertook the task of an explanation of Shakespeare's writings.

Before the time, in which Shakespeare wrote (from 1590—1615), there existed in England no literature, which was peculiarly the possession of the people. There were English poets, but no national English poetry; the most famous were learned men, who studied Latin and Italian poetry, and wrote in imitation of their model. Their sonnets, their allegories, their tales, could do little for a national poetry. In the circle of these men, Shakespeare entered with his narrative poems and sonnets. Even in these smaller works, amid the purest modesty and humility, the self-

reliance of the Poet, was decidedly expressed. In his sonnets he promises the young friend, to whom they are addressed, an immortality through his verses which shall endure as "long as men can breathe or eyes can see"; he challenges Time to do his utmost; in spite of his destroying power, his beloved shall, through his poetry, live in eternal youth. He will raise to him by his verses a monument, "which eyes, not yet created, shall o'erread", and tongues to be his being shall rehearse, when all "the breathers of this world are dead." Such virtue had his pen, that he shall still live, "where breath most breathes, even in the mouths of men".

This self-reliance in the poet must have extraordinarily increased with time, when he looked back on the work of his life. In Henry the 8th's time, the stage was only in its rough beginning; under Elizabeth it became the place, where first a national English literature found a home. The chivalric epopee, the Italian novel and lyric, were borrowed from the stranger; but with the foundation of the drama the Saxon genius of the people was awakened, and the stage became a national property. The people streamed from the churches to the play-houses, the court and the noble encouraged the works of dramatic art; protection from the upper classes, favour among the lower, the importance of its productions, raised the stage in a quarter of a century from the humblest to the highest position. Its intrinsic value, Shakespeare might well say, he had alone given it; celebrated protectors of the stage among the nobility were his especial patrons, two very different rulers in turn favoured his works particularly, and the people delighted in the representation of his characters.

This estimation of the poet was anticipated and partly fathomed by his contemporaries, even when they could not justly appreciate it. Among them no one has more beautifully expressed the admiration of the age, than Ben Jonson, who has been indeed too often cried down as an envier and an enemy of our poet. But in truth he was joined with Shakespeare, who first introduced him to the world and to the stage, in a lasting friendship, which redounded as much to the high honour of both as did that union of esteem between our own German poetic Dioscuri; and although his narrower intellectual horizon prevented him from estimating entirely the extent of Shakespeare's genius, he was yet ever sufficiently forgetful of self, to acknowledge with warm enthusiasm the honourable heart and the free open nature in the human character of his friend, as well as the high soaring of his richly imaginative and poetic mind. In his *Poetaster* (1601) he uttered a eulogy upon Virgil's art and worldly wisdom, which, it is believed, was pointed at Shakespeare's great present fame, and predicted his greater future glory

That which he has writ
Is with such judgment labour'd and distill'd
Through all the needful uses of our lives,
That, could a man remember but his lines,
He should not touch at any serious point,
But he might breathe his spirit out of him.

.
His learning savours not the school-like gloss,
That most consists in echoing words and terms,
And soonest wins a man an empty name;
Nor any long or far-fetch'd circumstance
Wrapp'd in the curious generalties of arts;
But a direct and analytic sum
Of all the worth and first effects of arts.
And for his poesy, 'tis so ramm'd with life,
That it shall gather strength of life with being,
And live hereafter more admir'd than now.

In his verses to the memory of his friend, published with the first edition of his works in 1623, he raises Shakespeare over the English dramatists, whom it was certainly not difficult to excel; he wishes moreover to call thundering Aeschylus, Euripides, Sophocles, and the Roman dramatists to life "to heare his Buskin tread, and shake a stage", or when "his Sockes were on", no one "of all that insolent Greece or haughtie Rome sent forth, or since did from their ashes come", could compare to him. "Triumph, my Britaine" he continues:

thou hast one to shoue,
 To whom all scenes of Europe homage owe.
 He was not of an age, but for all time!
 And all the Muses still were in their prime,
 When like Apollo he came forth to warme
 Our eares, or like a Mercury to charme!
 Nature herselfe was proud of his designes,
 And ioy'd to weare the dressing of his lines!
 Which were so richly spun and wouen so fit,
 As since, she will vouchsafe no other wit.
 The merry Greek, tart Aristophanes,
 Neat Terence, witty Plautus, now not please;
 But antiquated, and deserted lye
 As they were not of Nature's family.
 Yet must I not giue Nature all: Thy Art,
 My gentle Shakespeare, must enjoy a part.
 For though the Poet's matter Nature be,
 His Art doth giue the fashion

 For a good Poet's made, as well as borne.
 And such wert thou. Looke, how the father's face
 Liues in his issue, euen so, the race
 Of Shakespeare's minde and manners brightly shines
 In his well-torned and true-filed lines;
 In each of which he seemes to shake a Lance,
 As brandish't at the eyes of Ignorance.
 Sweet Swan of Auon: what a sight it were,
 To see thee in our waters yet appeare,

And make those flights upon the bankes of Thames,
 That so did take Eliza and our James!
 But stay, I see thee in the Hemisphere
 Advanc'd, and made a Constellation there!
 Shine forth, thou Starre of Poets, and with rage,
 Or influence, chide or cheere the drooping Stage;
 Which, since thy flight fro' hence, hath mourn'd like night,
 And despaire day, but for thy Volumes light.

How came it then, I repeat the question, that this Poet, whose worth was not unknown to himself, to the penetration of the discerning, and to the instinct of the masses in his own time, should have been almost forgotten a few years after his death, and for more than a century should have been wholly misunderstood. ? — The following is the solution of this enigma.

The favour, which the Poet enjoyed, could in his life have been in no wise universal, because his art itself was a contemned profession. The spirit of the austere moral religious age was in large circles of society hostilely opposed to the luxurious worldly works of the stage. Serious natures also in the literary world ridiculed compassionately the activity of the frivolous stage-poets who hoped for immortality from their iambics; the jealous among them attacked the art as a public scandal and corruption. Like the chivalric epic poets of the 14th century, many of the dramatic poets (like Greene and Gosson) repented in later years their former profane writings, implored their friends to leave the sinful art, and ended by dealing with religious subjects as an atonement for the past. The warmest defenders of the Drama must have themselves confessed that it was a matter needing support. The clergy, the magistrates, the corporation, steadily opposed all theatrical matters. Thus

the dramatic art in England had at the period of its highest excellence to protect itself against the threatenings and persecutions of active, important, and dreaded adversaries. The dramatic art was not rarely advantageous in a high degree to the poet and actor, but as in almost all times, and at that time to a much greater extent than now, it was infected with a moral stain. Where the alluring attraction of the art was direct and immediate, there, on the spot for the moment, the ensnaring charm elevated the poet; outside the doors, where the marvel had not been seen, he was disregarded and unknown.

But this was not the only thing which caused at this time the name and calling of a poet to be held in disrepute. It was not so well with writers of that day as with our own German poets of the former century, who appeared in times when political life lay fallow, when no opposing or rival activity disturbed and diverted, when the literary movement absorbed the entire life of the people and outweighed every other interest. With Shakespeare's time we may date the true beginning of English greatness: the religious energy of the people, the art and knowledge peculiar to the genius of the nation, and the commencement of the future political and maritime power of England, lie like a bud of rich promise in the period of Elizabeth's rule. With surprising rapidity arose the spirit of enterprise, the commerce, and industry of the Island kingdom; foreign policy received a great and national basis by the protestant movement against Spanish and Romish principles; the destruction of the invincible armada (1588), destined by Spain for the conquest of England, the bold contests by sea, which formed at the time a race of great sea-heroes, decided the political

superiority of the little England over the world-wide monarchy of Spain; after Elizabeth's death, Scotland was united to England, and then began the first prosperous colonial undertakings (1606), by which the outward power of the kingdom was extended and the inner obstacles to commerce removed. In this young political activity, in this fresh animated national feeling, literature could only form a part, and that small and obscure, in the great march of excited popular life, and only a small share of that divided interest was directed to the literature of the Drama. Thus it was, that two men of the first literary rank, such a philosopher as Francis Bacon, such a poet as Shakespeare, if not absolutely overlooked in that much excited period, were by no means universally known, and that they themselves gave probably little attention to their mutual works. The fame of poets, such as Ariosto and Tasso, Racine and Molière, Goethe and Schiller, passed quickly over the whole European world; of Shakespeare, no one abroad had heard in the 17th century, and even the evidence of his fame at home is sought out in later times with difficulty and toil. Thus had the mere notoriety of the poet to struggle at the very first with the whole weight of unfavourable circumstances; an understanding of his works was still less possible. His plays were only written for representation; those who did not see them, knew them not; it was with the dramatist as with the actor, whose sad lot it is, that his art cannot be made permanent, it passes away with the moment. The plays were not designed for reading; their appearance in print, for the most part fraudulently obtained, was regarded as an injury to the stage which was the proprietor of the manuscript, perhaps also as prejudicial to the renown of the poet, who not rarely in-

vented his scenes (as Marston says) "only to be spoken and not to be read." Thus then of Shakespeare's dramas also, only the half were printed during his life, and not a single one under his superintendence and revision. Not till seven years after his death did his works, collected by his fellow-actors, appear in a folio-edition (1623), of uncertain and unwarranted value; the older quarto-editions of single pieces (inveighed against it is true) appeared in this with all their senseless faults by the side of the newly-added, equally carelessly revised pieces, only really re-printed. This edition was re-published in 1632. At that time the plays of the poet were still held in popular honour; but already a Fletcher had surpassed the master in the favour of the over-excited stage-public; and with the characteristic lack of all criticism in that period of English literature, the reviewers were now utterly wanting, who might have discerned the pre-eminence of Shakespeare's works, and might have demonstrated the grounds of their superiority. Not long afterwards the whole stage was swept away by the altered current of the national life.

In 1642 began the civil religious wars in England, and in the same year all theatres in England were closed; the austere religious, puritan zeal conquered at length in its long struggle with the profane stage, and tolerated no more its unhallowed works. The same befell English literature after Shakespeare's time, that had befallen it in the 15th century after Chaucer's: the civil wars had so convulsed the nation and its civilisation, that no refuge remained. Twenty years of bloodshed and a complete overturning of public and private life almost effaced the remembrance of Shakespeare's literary epoch. When at the Restoration under

Charles II. and James II., with the court-diversions and a gayer life, the stage was also revived, the characters of the Shakespearian pieces became, it is true, again the test of theatrical skill, and the taste of the Saxon people returned even now with a predilection for their favourite, which seemed to the learned of the day as blameworthy as it was inexplicable; but the strong, riotous interest in the stage as in Shakespeare's time seized the multitude no more; the theatre was formed after the frivolous and light taste of the court, and was no longer susceptible to great and earnest works. Speedily French literature began to rule the world, the taste for the antique and stiff rules of art was in direct opposition to the popular character, and to the free spirit of the works of Shakespeare. This taste reached its highest point of contrast in the poetical productions of an Addison and Pope, and in the criticism of Thomas Rymer; who ascribed to an ape more taste and knowledge of nature than Shakespeare possessed, and pretended to find often more meaning, expression and humanity in the neighing of a horse and in the growling of a mastiff, than in Shakespeare's tragical flights. When in 1709 Nicholas Rowe undertook an edition of Shakespeare's works and attempted to sketch his life from tradition, he found that of such a wonderful man scarcely any thing was known, hardly even the originals of his writings, and of his life only a couple of unvouched for anecdotes, which even at the present day the most diligent inquiry has only been able to replace by a few authentic facts. From the Restoration until Garrick's time in the second half of the 18th century, many indeed of Shakespeare's plays were performed, but these in general most unworthily disfigured. At this time he was read and valued by Milton,

the greatest poet whom England since Shakespeare has possessed, a man, whose single appreciation might have been of more importance to our dramatist, than that of "the million". He found, that in the "deep impression" of his "Delphic lines" he had sepulchred himself in such pomp, "that kings, for such a tomb, would wish to die"; and yet even he regarded him only as the child of an unbridled fancy, as a sweet singer of "native wood-notes wild."

When in the 18th century literature stepped in advance of politics and religion, England also began with the revival of the older literature, to resuscitate Shakespeare's also. The re-awakening interest in his works and the slowly increasing estimation of his value is first perceived by a great continuous series of editions. From Rowe's first attempt in 1709 to produce a corrected reprint, there appeared every ten years at least one new edition of Shakespeare's works, Pope's 1725, Theobald's 1733, Hanmer 1744, Warburton 1747, Capell 1768, since Johnson 1765, with the addition of various readings and explanations, which under the united efforts of Steevens in 1766, Malone 1790, Reed 1793, Chalmers' 1811, and Boswell's 1821, more and more opened the way for the understanding of the poet. For the inward estimation indeed of his intellectual merit and artistic value, these works offered little that is useful, all the older among them up to Steevens and Malone were written under the tyranny of the French taste and the most haughty disregard and depreciation of the poet. The oracle of this taste was Voltaire. In his youth, after his residence in England, he had indeed himself proudly introduced Shakespeare into France, impelled by him he had written his *Brutus* in 1730, he had praised the English stage on account

of its abundance of action, and had timidly imitated some of its freedoms. But when, from the first French translation, analyses and elaborations of Shakespeare's plays by Delaplace and Ducis began to spread abroad the fame of the British poet, when the criticism of Arnaud and Mercier ventured indeed to attack the classical routine, when Letourneur, in his translation of Shakespeare in 1776, exalted the barbarous poet even beyond Corneille and Racine, then Voltaire's early favour was turned into the bitterest enmity. In the dissertation upon tragedy before Semiramis, he gave his opinion that Nature had blended in Shakespeare all that is most great and elevating, with all the basest qualities that belong to rudeness without genius; he called Hamlet a rude play, which would not be endured even by the lowest mob in France and Italy; he could say, it was the fruit of the imagination of an intoxicated savage! Thus æsthetic narrow-mindedness judged the greatest phenomenon of modern poetry; but it was an oracle. How should the commentators advance further, who had in themselves much less poetry than even Voltaire, amongst whom the acute Warburton declared, that he had only looked through *this kind of writers*, such as Shakespeare, in his younger days to refresh himself after more grave employments. Thus it was easy, if one regarded the general judgments of these interpreters, to ridicule their pedantic siftings, their æsthetic fancies, their paltry corrections, and their assumed superiority over the poet; our Romanticists in Germany have scornfully despised them. This was neither due nor honourable. These editors had received the poet's works as something quite foreign to them in language, habits, and circumstances; the later among them since Johnson, have with

unwearied investigation of numerous and worthless sources made the poet readable and enjoyable in language and matter; by suitable explanations they have transformed obscure passages into beauties, and by ingenious conjectures they have converted single deformities of language into true, even here and there elevated poetry. These laborious works first discovered to the nation the hidden treasures of the poet; the givers and receivers were earnest in seeking to understand the subject matter of the poet so indispensable to the spiritual perception of his writings, and without which those German critics and translators would have been debarred even from acquaintance with their favourite. For the inner understanding of the Poet, these editions of his works, I have said, offered little that was useful; that little was limited to isolated, psychological, and æsthetic remarks. In Warburton, in Johnson, and in Steevens, the most intelligent of all, there are excellent explanations of certain passages, traits, and characters, which burst forth amid prejudices and false judgment, as proofs, how the greatness of the poet prevailed more and more even over the narrow minds of these criticisers. But like Voltaire and most of the French critics, they held fast their prejudices, without feeling how absurd it was to believe that in one man the extreme of coarseness could be united in glaring contrast with the greatest sublimity; even to a Villemain (in his essay on Shakespeare in 1839) it could happen, that in one breath he spoke of the rude and barbarous genius, and of his unattainable tenderness in the treatment of female character. In accordance with this kind of partial investigation, with these passing flashes of perception, followed alternately by greater darkness, was the treatment of Shakespeare on the

stage, both in Germany and England. The jubilee two hundred years after Shakespeare's birth, celebrated in Stratford in 1764, denotes about the time, when through Garrick the poet's works were revived upon the English stage. Then, women urged for his monument in Westminster, clubs were formed for the performance of his plays, and Garrick promoted the study of his characters. He banished the stiff pomposity of the French drama, all straining for effect, and all preposterous representation, and reinstated in their rights, nature, simplicity, and genuine humour. Annually he produced about eighteen of Shakespeare's plays, and endeavoured to purify them from past disfigurement. But all that we know of the histrionic concerns of this period, sufficiently shows that only single actors conceived the idea of single parts; of a play as a whole, as Shakespeare must have conceived it, there was no idea. So even Schroeder in Germany attained to a wonderful height of success in the representation of Shakespeare's characters, but he too stood alone. It is said, that an actress, who played the part of Goneril with him in *King Lear*, was so agitated by Lear's curse, that she would never again set foot upon the stage; the anecdote does all honour to Schroeder's playing, but it may be conjectured, that the actress was far from sharing his art. Thus slowly and step by step through commentators, an understanding of isolated passages and poetic beauties was obtained, — through actors and through a series of writings upon the leading figures of the Shakespeare dramas, an understanding of single characters and psychological truths was arrived at, but the whole of the poet and of each of his single works remained an enigma: The alterations of Shakespeare's plays even by Garrick and

Schroeder, furnishes evidence in itself only too plainly, that these judges were themselves far from a just perception of them. Nevertheless, this was the especial period of the revival of Shakespeare in England; it was, at the same time, the period of his first introduction into Germany. For the clear perception and estimation of Shakespeare as well as for the ripening of our own germinating dramatic art, this was of equally decided importance.

The man, who first valued Shakespeare according to his full desert, was indisputably Lessing. One single passage, where, in his *Dramaturgie*, he speaks of *Romeo and Juliet*, shows plainly, that he apprehended his plays in their innermost nature, and this with the same unbiassed mind, with which the poet wrote them. With all the force of a true taste, he pointed to Wieland's translation of the English dramatist, when scarcely any one in Germany knew him. Not long before, Shakespeare had been in plain earnest compared amongst us with *Gryphius*, now Lessing appeared and discovered in the great tragic poet an accordance with the highest pretensions of Aristotle. The English editors and expositors of his works were yet under the Gallic yoke, when Lessing cast aside the French taste and the opinion of Voltaire, and with one stroke so transformed the age, that *we* now ridiculed the false sublimity of the French Drama, as they had formerly laughed at English rudeness. Lessing's recommendation of the English poet was closely followed by Eschenburg's translation, and a completely changed taste among our young dramatists. To form the even balance of judgment, a rude counterpoise to the exaggerations of French propriety appeared for the moment a necessity. In Goethe's youthful circle in Strasburg, they spoke

in Shakespeare's puns, jokes, and pleasantries, they wrote in his tone and style, they exhibited all the coarseness and nakedness of nature in contrast to French gloss and varnish, and felt themselves from identity of character as much at home with the Germanic nature of Shakespeare as with Hans Sachs. In the camp of these free spirits, the cry was for power and nature, and the result was the exaggeration of both in caricature; both in the pictures from Shakespeare's works by the painter Füssli, and in the poetical imitations of Klinger and Lenz. But this enthusiastic appropriation and devotion, this poetic imitation of the English master, even in the youthful works of Schiller and Goethe, led nevertheless here to a totally different, a more spiritual kind of understanding. The distortion and extravagance of their early opinions passed in time from the minds of these men, who as poets and critics were equally prepared to take a wholly different view of the study of Shakespeare to that of the English commentators of old; the image of the poet is set forth for the first time in the unassuming truth of nature. In *Wilhelm Meister*, Goethe produced that characteristic of Hamlet, which is like a key to all works of the poet; here all divided and separated beauty is rejected, and the whole explained by the whole, the soul of the outer framework and its animating breath is exhibited, which created and organized the immortal work. Unfortunately Goethe went no further in explanation of the poet; he thought later, that all was inadequate that could be said about him, although he knew that he had found the entrance to his innermost shrine. He was, like Voltaire, out of humour besides, that Shakespeare should have surpassed him in in-

portance; he had once wished to emulate him, later he felt that the great poet would sink him to the bottom.

Shakespeare rocked the cradle of our newly-born dramatic poetry in the former century, and had nursed its youthful efforts. This immense gain from the revived poet Germany dared not acknowledge with slight recompense. With us now ensued the reverse of that which had happened in England in the 18th century. We wrote no critical notes upon the poet; wanting the materials, we wanted also the vocation for them. We translated him; and while the English possess a series of editions, we have from Wieland and Eschenburg to Schlegel and Voss and even down to the disciples of Tieck and many subsequent stragglers, a whole number of translations, ever newly issued and ever newly read. If there the annotations almost concealed the text, they gave us for the most part the text without any notes. This accustomed us to quite another manner of reading the poet. When the Englishman passed perhaps with difficulty over isolated passages, we, on the contrary, destitute of all explanations, read rapidly on; we were careless about parts, and compared to the English reader we lost many separate beauties and ideas, but we enjoyed the whole more fully. For this enjoyment we were chiefly indebted to the translation of A. W. Schlegel, which even Englishmen read with admiration. The archaisms are here erased, the rough words of the period gently modified, yet the whole character faithfully maintained. The sensibility of the German nature, the flexibility of our language, the taste and mind of the translator, procure for this work equally great and lasting honour. More than any other effort on behalf of the English poet, this translation has made him our own. Ad-

miration reached a fresh point. And this rather with us than in England. For it is to me beyond a doubt, that the criticism of the old English editors, as for example not long ago again appeared by Courtenay, would have been quite impossible with us in Germany, even in one such exception. Old prophecies concerning the poet's future seemed to be accomplished. For truly with us has happened that which Leonard Digges, a contemporary of Shakespeare, wrote of his works: — they would keep him young for all time, and the day would come when every thing modern would be despised, every thing that was not Shakespeare's would be esteemed an abortion; then every verse in his works would rise anew, and the poet be redeemed from the grave!

However great were the merits of our Romanticists in having arranged Shakespeare's works for our enjoyment, even they have only little contributed to the inner perceptions after which we seek, to the unfolding of the human nature of the poet and the general value of his works. In A. W. Schlegel's dramatic Lectures (1812) the pieces are singly discussed. All testifies here to poetic delicacy and sensibility, all is fair, alluring, inspiring, a panegyric of a totally different kind, to the criticising characteristics of the English expositors. But more than this, more than the contrast of admiration compared with the former blame, more than the application of a natural taste to the works of the poet in opposition to the French prejudices of the former period, — more than this, this delineation offers not, full of suggestion as it is, it fell far short of satisfying even Schlegel's nearest friends.

The plan which Goethe had designed in *Wilhelm Meister*, was not continued. In 1823, Franz Horn in five vol-

umes on Shakespèare diluted the Schlegel characteristics still more, tickled by that insipid humour, which was intended to exhibit the comic power of our romanticists, he took especial delight in the clowns, and sees the poet even in his most earnest moods, through a medium of sarcastic ridicule: his unqualified praise, coupled with so much absurdity, is almost an insult. Subsequently Tieck for many years excited our expectation of a comprehensive work on Shakespèare; he gave much evidence of a deep study of the poet and his time, and still further tokens of a secret wisdom and initiation, but the promised whole appeared not, and the fragments which did appear promised nothing.

The great zeal for Shakespèare manifested in German literature reacted in the beginning of this century upon England. When Nathan Drake in 1817 published his ample work upon Shakespèare and his times, the idolatry of the poet had passed already to his native land. The æsthetic view is little cared for by Drake; greater industry is bestowed upon the picture of the times; the "poetic antiquarian" was to be contented; but the work has the merit of having brought together the tedious and scattered material of the editions and of the many other valuable labours of Tyrwhitt, Heath, Ritson, Monck Mason, Seymour, Douce &c. for the first time into a whole. Quite a different treatment of the poet had been attempted by Coleridge even before Drake. He had from 1811 to 1812 held lectures upon Shakespèare, so much in Schlegel's mind and manner, that a dispute arose as to the priority of merit of the two æsthetic philosophers. Coleridge's genuine lectures were never printed; only a few fragments are remaining, just to prove to us, that he of all Englishmen first measured

the poet by a true standard. He declaimed against the French notion, that in Shakespeare all was the emanation of a genius unconscious of himself, "that he grew immortal as it were in his own despite"; he justly contended, that his judgment was commensurate with his genius, that he was no wild *lusus naturæ*, that his so called "irregularity", was only the dream of a few pedants.

He advanced the assertion, then a bold one in England, that not merely the splendour of parts constituted the greatness of Shakespeare, by compensating for the barbarous shapelessness of the whole, but that he found the æsthetic form of the whole equally admirable with the matter, and the judgment of the great poet not less deserving our wonder than his innate genius. He (and since him Campbell and so many other enthusiastic admirers) placed him quite out of comparison with other poets; he declared it an absurdity, to prefer him earnestly to Racine and Corneille, or to compare him with Spenser and Milton; he saw him stand so exalted above all, that he would have him only compared with himself.

A wide spread interest for Shakespeare and the literature of his time has been again excited in England of late years. Yet highly characteristic now as in the former century, this interest clings to the matter alone. It would almost seem, as if England had especially resigned to her women (Jameson, Griffith, Montagu and others) the task of handling Shakespeare's intellectual side, although this cannot surely be a woman's work. The Percy, Camden, and Shakespeare societies emulate each other in the publication of rare sources; the works of the poetical contemporaries of Shakespeare have appeared in excellent editions, espe-

cially in the hands of Al. Dyce; and since Collier's first debate as to the ground of a new edition of Shakespeare, we may date in England a new period of Shakespeare criticisms, in which no longer cavilling fault-finders, but enlightened admirers purified and explained the works of the poet. For a time Collier and Charles Knight maintained the field alone; recently Dyce, Howard Staunton, Singer in a new revision of his careful edition of 1826, Halliwell with his splendid edition, formed a more complete cluster; and urged by this animating spirit of emulation, even in Germany, Delius, Tycho Mommsen, F. A. Leo and others, were carried away by these philosophical efforts in a matter hardly to be expected from foreigners. Unfortunately with this eagerness of the English at the present day, is entwined the history of a long-prepared and long-continued literary fraud, which a witty writer has called a new *affaire du Collier*: an extensive web of deceptions, in which first of all the life of Shakespeare has been falsified with pleasing inventions, and then the text of his works has been threatened with an invasion of alterations, the dangerous novelty of which awakened the attention of the critic, and rendered his eye so acute that the deception, hardly suspected, was at once discovered and proved.* Painful as it is, to see the history of Shakespeare's after-life disfigured by this high-treason against the crowned head of the English language and literature, perpetrated on this very poet, to whom no

* I content myself with referring to the works of two paleographers who have decided this matter: Hamilton, an enquiry into the genuineness of the Ms. corrections in Mr. S. P. Collier's annotated Shakespeare folio 1632. London 1860. Ingleby, a complete view of the Shakespeare controversy. London 1861.

human vice was so detestable as falsehood and forgery, it cannot but be gratifying to me to pass over this interlude with this slight mention, since the famous various readings of the Bridgewater and Perkins folios, even if they were best authenticated, would hardly have affected my special task, which is only concerned with the general psychological and æsthetic examination of the poet. On this point nothing of importance has occurred in England during all the years of these new movements and endeavours with regard to Shakespeare.

Thus we ever return, when we seek a model-explanation of Shakespeare's works, to Goethe and his interpretation of Hamlet. Upon this remarkable play, the most glaringly opposed opinions were to centre; the turning-point of the true appreciation of the poet was to issue from these conflicting views. Voltaire, who had read this piece, in order to criticise and make use of it, saw in it only a heap of disconnected, confused scenes. His verdict deserves never to be forgotten. "Hamlet", thus he characterizes the drama, "is mad in the second act, and his mistress is so in the third; the prince kills the father of his mistress, feigning to kill a rat, and the heroine throws herself into the river. They bury her on the stage; the gravediggers utter quodlibets, worthy of them, holding skulls in their hands; prince Hamlet replies to their disgusting follies with coarseness not less disgusting. During this time, one of the actors makes the conquest of Poland. Hamlet, his mother and his stepfather drink together on the stage; they sing at table, they quarrel, they strike, and they kill." Now arose Goethe, and this same alleged chaos suddenly appeared as an harmonious world full of admirable order. He pointed

out one single bond which linked together the apparently disconnected scenes and characters, one single thought, to which every action and every figure may be traced. Every inconsistency of character finds its explanation, every offending passage its justification, every apparently incidental part or action its necessity, every heterogeneous episode its connection with the whole. The explanation justified that declaration of Coleridge's, that the form and structure of Shakespeare's plays are indeed as worthy of admiration, as they had before been decried as barbarous. This result of Goethe's examination was so new and striking, that he thought himself obliged to bring forward the objection of the traditional opinion; so accustomed was the world to see in Shakespeare only the Muses' untutored child of nature, that it was confounded to be obliged suddenly to seek in his works a systematic, well-digested, artistic design, which constituted him just as calm and superior a thinker, as he had previously been estimated a wild natural genius.

And yet in the interpretation of this play, we can go even further than Goethe went, and the work becomes clearer at every step and increases in attraction and depth. And more than this; in almost each of Shakespeare's works, the same structure upon one undeviating plan is to be shown, as in Hamlet. Not in all in like manner; not in the apprentice-works of his early youth, and not in the same degree in the firstfruits of his independent creation as in the riper productions of the poet; but throughout gradually from the first it may be traced, how Shakespeare instinctively out of one single idea laboured for that moral unity in his plays, with which he has satisfied the most severe demands of art of the oldest æsthetics.

It was to be expected, that the example of Goethe's explanation of Hamlet would not be lost. What he did for the single piece, it would soon be wished to see carried out for the whole. To venture this attempt, is even my task; now that the way has been once indicated, it will be yet oftener done; the effort has been already made; although only in Germany, and even there, hardly in Goethe's exact meaning. At the prime of the new romantic school; when the British writer forced his way to Italy, when in 1821 and 1822 they strove even again in France after better translations of Shakespeare*, when the Globe maintained the Germanic tendencies of art, when an English theatre in Paris (1827) introduced the poet in his perfect form, and young dramatists undertook to follow his flight, Guizot suffered himself to be impelled to a spirited study of Shakespeare (1821. 1858), not however by Goethe, but by Schlegel. Yet he too stopped at the controversy of the time, without wishing to decide it, whether the dramatic system of the Englishman were not better than Voltaire's, the question Lessing had long ago settled. He saw that it was obstinate to deny the art and rule in Shakespeare's plays; striving to discover it for himself and for others, he was on the track of the rule of their moral unity; he perceived with admiration their structure upon one ruling idea, which referred every part to one and the same aim, and at every step revealed the profundity of the plan as well as the greatness of the execution; but he found this unity of idea in tragedy alone and not in comedy, where, the more concealed it lies, only

* Only quite lately a complete and completely true and unvarnished prose translation has been undertaken in France by François Victor Hugo. (1859.)

with the greater nicety is it observed; moreover he contented himself with having pointed it out only generally, without proving it in detail in his analyses, on which all however hinged. In H. N. Hudson's lectures on Shakespeare (1848) this great æsthetic question has been hardly glanced at. Every critic of Shakespeare will highly rejoice at this American's fine appreciation and estimate of the poet on the whole; in the development of single characters on the other hand he is throughout impeded by the intermixture of individual points of view, and the want of an extensive knowledge of human nature; with respect to the internal structure of the pieces, the reader will above all see with surprise, that this critic was not even aware of moral unity in them, that he overlooked the poetic justice, and saw a kind of moral confusion prevail throughout. If this were just, the attempt to give a more profound explanation of Shakespeare's works would be hardly worth while. The best part of his art would fall to the ground; for if poetry does not exhibit the rule of moral justice, it degrades itself to a lower position than that of genuine history. Among the German interpreters, Ulrici has attempted to tread the path pointed out by Goethe, which I also have purposed to pursue.

It must ever be the case, that interpreters, occupied with the same predilection upon the same subject, should meet upon many points. Yet it seems to me that our philosophical method of examination is not applicable to the poetry of a time, whose peculiar philosophy sought knowledge in a totally different manner to our own; it is not applicable to the works of a poet of honest healthy mind, whose eye and ear were his pilot and steersman through life and the world,

who, rich as he was in philosophic profoundness, was still further removed than Goethe from philosophy itself. And just so far should we place philosophy from his poetry; for the effect will ever be discordant, when the barren field of speculation approaches too closely this fresh green of reality.

Shakespeare's works should properly only be explained by representation. For that and for that alone were they written; the separation of dramatic poetry from histrionic art, through which both arts have suffered, was unknown in Shakespeare's time. The main difficulty to the understanding of his plays lies thus alone in this, that we read them and do not see them. For full as they are of poetic beauties, of psychological characteristics, of moral worldly wisdom, of references and allusions to the circumstances and persons of the time, they divert the attention to the most different points, and place a difficulty in the way of the comprehension and enjoyment of the whole. But when they are performed by actors, who are equal to the poet, a division of labour takes place, which, by the interposition of a second art, assists us to the easier enjoyment of the first. Actors, who have understood their parts, relieve us of the trouble we have in reading, of separating perhaps twenty different characters, and understanding them and their mutual relations; the appearance, the words, the behaviour of each actor, explain to us, without effort, as in a picture, the figures and the mainspring of the action; by the finest threads they guide us through the intricacies of the plot, and lead us by an easy way into the most inner and secret part of the artistic structure. He, therefore, who thus explains Shakespeare's works, that he prepares the actor for the perception of the whole and of his part, and

initiates him; as it were, for such an intelligent and perfect representation, that, if carried into execution, would give the true artistic interpretation, he would best explain the poet, and would have seized the only method which places no constraint upon his works.

But if the works of Shakespeare were singly explained in this manner, there yet remains another and more difficult task: so to arrange these evidences of the poet's activity, that they, brought before us not in systematic combination, but in their living succession, should in their inner connection lead us again from the scattered variety to one higher common point, to the creative spirit of the poet. Let this genius of the poet be watched in its development, be discerned and traced out in its imperfect embryo, in its growth, and in its finished form, from the compared abundant contents of his works and the scanty sources concerning his life, let even a pale image be sketched of the mental condition, the personal peculiarity and circumstances of the great man, — between both, between his inner life and his poetry, with a few speaking touches, let a bridge be thrown, a connection pointed out, which may show that with Shakespeare as with every rich poetic nature, no outer routine and poetic propriety, but inner experiences and emotions of the mind were the deep springs of his poetry, — then first would that be truly acquired, which would bring us near to our favourite: we should draw out the sum of his personal existence, and obtain a full picture, a living view of his mental stature. And such as we are in our weakness: we believe that we possess our gods, only when we have brought them into human form, and so we have also the natural desire to know the minds whom we honour in their works, in their person-

al and human nature. But in this matter almost every thing from which we draw is only hypothetic and fragmentary, and it is to be feared that the recital which springs from such sources, will be rather a poem of the historian's, than a history of the poet. But a similar hazard attends every historical recital; every historical work of art reflects the mind of the narrator no less than the subject presented; and this only acquires a living reality for the human mind, when it has been received and newly fashioned by the creative power of human genius. Thus this attempt also may be ventured on, even in the danger of finding in the following narration more fiction than truth.

SHAKESPEARE AT STRATFORD.

In a note to Shakespeare's sonnets Steevens wrote for our information, concerning the poet's circumstances, the following sentence: "all that we know with any certainty of Shakespeare is, that he was born in Stratford on Avon, married and had children; that he went to London, where he appeared as an actor, and wrote poems and plays; that he returned to Stratford, made his will, died, and was buried." If good fortune have not preserved for us somewhere the Lives of all poets, over which Thomas Heywood, a prolific poet, contemporary and acquaintance of Shakespeare, worked more than twenty years, our curiosity on this point will most probably be left unsatisfied. For this inadequacy of our knowledge of Shakespeare's outer life, we are sometimes consoled with the idea, that the history of his mind on the other hand is all the more complete. This is true; but we must at the same time acknowledge, that notwithstanding we must seek the necessary starting point for the history of this mind in the scanty information concerning Shakespeare's life. With this intention we select from the few touches of his outer history only that which could have influenced the inner character and the formation of the poet's mind.

In this matter we shall not too pedantically disdain to take into consideration even that which in the uncertain myths and traditions is only possible and probable; for even a mere supposition, though it only casts a doubtful twilight upon the history of Shakespeare's development, is for our aims far more important, than the most certain statements as to his goods and chattels, upon which in England so much industry has been bestowed.

The Shakespeare family ever since the 14th century had spread and multiplied in Warwickshire. It was not originally established in Stratford on Avon, the birth-place of William Shakespeare; the poet's father, John Shakespeare, probably first settled here about 1551. This man in the city records was once termed a glover; but then we find him also designated as a yeoman and occupied with agricultural objects; and again other doubtful although old traditions make him a wool-stapler or a butcher; all of which can be easily combined if we think of him as a small proprietor, who endeavoured to turn his produce in corn, cattle, wool, and leather to account as a local merchant. John's father, Richard Shakespeare of Snitterfield near Stratford, the grandfather of our poet, seems to have been a tenant of Robert Arden's of Wilmecote.

A union between the two families was formed by John Shakespeare, who in 1557 married Maria, the youngest of Robert Arden's seven daughters, a year after her father's death. The Ardens were one of the most considerable and most opulent Warwick families; we know that they rivalled the Dudleys, at the period that Leicester stood at the height of his power; the marriage was thus an evidence of John Shakespeare's position, and intimates that he must have been

in good circumstances, prosperous, if not rich. This is confirmed by other evidence. In the year 1564, we have the opportunity of comparing his charitable contributions with those of other inhabitants of Stratford, and these place him in the second rank in the corporation. He was the owner of several houses, and in the city records he appears gradually rising in rank and importance, as juryman, constable, chamberlain, alderman, and at last, from Michaelmas 1568 to Michaelmas 1569, as bailiff of Stratford, the highest place in the corporation.

John Shakespeare lived till 1601, his wife till 1608; both lived to see the success and prosperity of their much-famed son. William Shakespeare was baptized on the 26th April 1564; many biographers are pleased to give credence to an utterly uncertain tradition, that he was born on the 23rd April, the day on which he also died. Of the eight children of John Shakespeare, four sons and four daughters, he was the eldest son. He survived the plague which burst out soon after his birth; providence preserved him; several of the other children died early; one brother, Edmund, was subsequently an actor with him at the same theatre.

There was in Stratford a free grammar-school, where the sons of all members of the corporation were educated gratuitously. Here must William Shakespeare have learned the rudiments of the classical languages, which at that time were far more cultivated than now. We shall seize this first opportunity to touch briefly in this place on the much-disputed point of Shakespeare's education and acquirements. According to an unproved tradition in Rowe's life of Shakespeare, the father of our poet, being in needy circumstances, was under the necessity of withdrawing his son premature-

ly from school, and he is said to have then become a school-master in the country. Two other reports at the end of the 17th century, one of which comes from the lips of a parish-clerk at Stratford, 80 years age, relate that William learned the butcher trade of his father. All three communications intimate an interruption and deficiency in the poet's education, in which we readily believe, however much we may admire the self-instruction, with which he subsequently must have compensated for it. In the days of his first successes, Shakespeare in depicting a wide gap, employs in his sonnets the image of the distance between learning and his "rude ignorance"; a true scholar like Ben Jonson might say of him in the consciousness of his own learning, that he had possessed "small Latin and less Greek". Farmer has thus unnecessarily taken the trouble to prove that Shakespeare read Plutarch not in Greek, but in the English translation. Alexander Dyce, however, makes a remark upon this, which in fact decides the whole strife concerning the poet's education and knowledge. "If he could not read Plutarch in the original", says the reverend critic, "I will only observe, that not a few worthy gentlemen of our day, who have taken their degrees in Oxford or Cambridge, are in the same case."

To us Germans the nature and condition of Shakespeare's education may be made perfectly clear by one word of comparison. Our Goethe and Schiller appear, compared to Voss, just as Shakespeare does compared to Ben Jonson. They read, they understood their Homer only in a German translation. But that the one learned to scan from Voss, and the other later consulted Humboldt at an advanced age of life, whether he still ought to study Greek, affords no con-

clusion as to their whole intellectual training. Just as little can Shakespeare's small amount of Greek witness against the cultivation of his mind, aye, not even against the extent of his information. Rather, we may venture to say, that Shakespeare had in his time few equals in the range of his manifold knowledge. How too, in this respect, have the opinions of the present day changed from those of an earlier date! The publishers of the former century on account of some historical, geographical, chronological errors, looked down upon the ignorant poet with an air of superiority. Now, however, whole volumes are written, to prove his knowledge of true and fabulous natural history, to evidence his familiarity with the Bible, to establish his agreement with Aristotle, to make him one and the same person as the philosopher Bacon! Now a legal authority like Lord Campbell (Shakespeare's legal acquirements considered, 1859) has seriously examined a former conjecture, which even contemporaries seem to have shared: that Shakespeare before his transition to the stage had been employed in the office of an attorney; and although the severe judge, for the want of satisfying proofs, considers the inference drawn from such a partial representation of the poet's knowledge of law to be as venturesome as if we would conjecture a naval or sporting school on account of his knowledge of hunting and shipping, still even he finds, that it demanded the most richly endowed of all men, by mere presence at judicial proceedings or by intercourse with attorneys, to contract the fluency and technical accuracy of expression, and allusions to law matters and forms, which are so striking in Shakespeare's works. Thus Armitage Brown concluded from the poet's Italian knowledge, that he must have travelled in Italy!

And if we will not assume, which is most decidedly contrary to the principles of the moral character of our poet, that he took great pains to affect a knowledge of the Latin, French, Italian and even Spanish languages, we must confess, that he has shown greater acquaintance with these languages, than is acquired in mere pastime. With respect to his classical learning, it has been rightly alleged, in behalf of his more fundamental knowledge of Latin, that he used single words of this language in the genuine original signification which they have lost with their adoption into English. Whoever would gather together proofs of his extensive reading, would find a wide and vast field of literature, with which the poet was familiar; and when we discover matter for criticism in his knowledge of history and geography, we must not forget, that at that time chronicles were the only histories of which he knew, and that geography was rarely a subject for study. Yet if we were to believe that Shakespeare's wanton anachronisms in *Midsummernight's dream* or in *Winter's Tale* arose from pure ignorance, we should be committing the same absurdity, as that English critic, who reproached Goethe seriously with the superstition, with which in the beginning of his autobiography he has discussed the constellations at his birth.

We return to the history of the poet's youth. Little to be relied on has reached our knowledge, but sufficient to allow us to guess, that his earliest experiences must have planted an abundance of deep impressions in his soul, which may have subsequently become rich sources for his poetic creations. A course of misfortunes befell him and his house at the period when passion, sensibility, and imagination are strongest in men: he had to eat the bitter bread of tribulation and to

pass through inner and outer sorrow, that school of great minds and powerful characters. From his fourteenth year the former prosperity of his father's house was broken up; a stroke of misfortune befell his mother's family, the Ardens; his own indiscretion and self-created distress followed; so that we see, he had not only to experience a season of adversity, but also one of indignity, which developed side by side his good and bad qualities. We will singly pass in review the main facts. From 1578, when William was fourteen years old, the affairs of the father, John Shakespeare, declined. He was obliged in this and the year following to mortgage an estate (Ashbies) in Wilmecote, and shortly after to sell his wife's share in other possessions in Snitterfield; moreover we find, that in the years 1578—79 he was exempted from all poor rates and other public contributions. From the last year, being "warned", he ceased to attend the halls, and on this account in 1586 he was superseded by another in his position as alderman, it would seem without his own wish or consent in the matter. Just about this time the return to a distringas was, that there was nothing found to seize; and soon afterwards we find him degraded even to imprisonment for debt. In the year 1592, his name appears in the report of a commission, which had to take note of those who did not come monthly to church, according to royal command; and the memorandum is subjoined, that John Shakespeare "coome not to churche for feare of processe for debte". In the documents which relate to these domestic circumstances, he is now always designated as a "yeoman". Perhaps he had given up his retail-trade for agricultural pursuits, and had thus fallen into difficulties. From all this it may be inferred, and we find it subsequently

confirmed, that the children were early thrown upon themselves and their own resources.

A misfortune of another kind befell his mother's family, the Ardens, when our poet was in his 19th year. The head of this family was Edward Arden of Park Hall. The jealousy of the two Warwick houses of Arden and Dudley has been slightly referred to before. It was deadly between this Edward Arden and the notorious Earl of Leicester, a character so familiar to all readers of Schiller's *Maria Stuart* and Walter Scott's *Kenilworth*. When Leicester in the year 1575, in those famous festivities at Kenilworth, entertained and wooed Queen Elizabeth, he was carrying on at the time a criminal intercourse with the countess of Essex, whom he married after the death of her husband in 1576. Even before she was his wife, Edward Arden had uttered harsh expressions to Leicester about this intercourse concealed by his power and insolence from the court and queen; possibly this may have happened during those festivities at Kenilworth, and that Leicester's connection was thus made known to the queen, who ended her sojourn at the castle of Kenilworth by sudden departure. For these reproaches Leicester bore an irreconcilable hatred towards Arden. He entangled him in a charge of high-treason and Edward was executed in the year 1583.

However removed now the leading branches of the Arden family would have stood from the impoverished Shakespeares, it is easy to understand that this fall would be deeply felt by them. The incidents exhibit both families in decline and misfortune; the hard lines of life's discipline may have been stamped by it on the mind of the young poet. These circumstances may have been healthful for the

formation of his character, for at the same time we discover traits of a youthful levity to which these grave family events were well fitted to act as a counter-balance.

It was to Nicholas Rowe, the first in 1709 who wrote a life of our poet, that the actor Betterton related the oft-told anecdote of Shakespeare's deer-stealing, which he had heard at Stratford. He had fallen, so the story goes, into bad company and had taken part in some deer-stealing at Charlcote, the property of Sir Thomas Lucy; he had been prosecuted by Sir Thomas, and had revenged himself with a satirical ballad, of which elsewhere a stanza is preserved; this had redoubled the persecution against him to that degree, that he was obliged to leave Stratford and go to London. What warrant there is for this story, what genuineness belongs to the preserved stanza of the ballad upon Sir Thomas Lucy, we cannot indeed say. Country-people near Stratford to this day have indeed pointed out to strangers a statue of Diana with the hind, which they exhibit as the poacher Shakespeare; if Betterton's authority were of this kind, the anecdote would certainly be very suspicious. Still an external confirmation of it lies indeed strongly marked out in the introductory scene of "the merry wives of Windsor". Here the poet is thought to have immortalized that story of his youth, transferring his deer-stealing to Falstaff, and ridiculing in the person of the proud Robert Shaal, to whom he assigned a shield with 12 luces, Sir Thomas Lucy himself, whose arms bore actually three; and just so, as the welsh priest pronounces the English word luces as lowsie, the wit of the stanza of the ballad*,

* A parliament member, a justice of peace,
At home a poor scarecrowe, at London an asse —

which is extant, turns entirely upon this dialectic perversion of the name Lucy.

But apart from these circumstantial proofs, the anecdote carries with it the decided marks of a most characteristic trait. It seems as little possible in the domain of literature and art as in that of politics, that rapid and great changes in these branches of the cultivation of a people can take place, without an anarchical transition-state which is wont to reflect itself most glaringly in the irregular strong-minded characters of the first vehicle of those changes. The men who were instrumental in a complete revolution in our German dramatic poetry, Wagner and Lenz, those greater ones also, who sooner mastered themselves in moral dignity and honour, Klinger, Goethe and Schiller, appear in their youth as the prey of the same strong passion, the same titan-like nature, the same disregard of conventional habits and restraints, as they depicted in their early poems. We find ourselves in a similar association with the Dramatists, who revived the English stage in Shakespeare's time; only that the few traits which we possess of them, are, according to the character of the age, far more coarsely drawn. The names of Marlowe and Greene in connection with Shakespeare correspond in the English drama to the place which those youthful friends of Goethe occupy in Germany; in the manner of their poetry, in their envious literary jealousy, in their whole moral bearing. Marlowe both by word and

If lowsie is Lucy as some volke miscall it,
 Then Lucy is lowsie, whatever befall it.
 He thinks himself great,
 Yet an asse in his state
 We allow by his ears but with asses to mate.

writing is said to have depreciated and scorned at religion; satirical poems call him a swearer and blasphemer, an associate of all who reject the law of God; his poetical contemporaries deplored, that his wit, bestowed by heaven, consorted with vices, born of hell. Robert Greene was a decayed clergyman and died, it is said, of immoderate wine-drinking; his violent opponent, the doctor Gabriel Harvey, laid to his charge the most scandalous life, and appealed for confirmation of it to the general cognisance of the city of London; even Greene himself spoke at last of his works as follies in a tone of repentance, which does not testify a happy conscience. It was also known of Peele, Thomas Nash, and Lodge, that they led an unruly, unsteady life, persisting in no regular industry; all except the last, died early, and Marlowe by violence. In the fashion of these wildlings, Shakespeare's youthful habits may likewise have begun; it may certainly be, that in that bad company of which Rowe relates, he may have led the life which he subsequently depicts so strikingly in Henry IV. His deer-stealing may easily have been the most innocent part of this life. The age regarded this careless existence, such as the tavern-life, the robbing of gardens and the dancing round the May-pole, the oft-blamed, never discontinued customs of the young, rather as wantonness, than as crime, as we designate the peculations of the school-boy, with a forbearing expression (*schuessen*, to shoot), which almost reminds one of poaching. There are, however, other and as it seems indisputable testimonies existing, which show the young Shakespeare addicted to dissolute habits in other directions also.

We might indeed already infer these habits from a se-

ries of Shakespeare's poems, at the close of his collection of sonnets, poems; which, with just as much unvarnished morality as candour, declare the poet's connection with a married woman, who shared a faithless love between him and one of his friends. The English endeavoured in every possible manner to dispute the prosaic truth of the subject of these poems, and thus, their moral conclusions. The æsthetic infallibility of the poet was of less moment to them, than that as a man their favourite should be a faultless saint. It is a trait, which does just as much honour to the moral feeling of the nation, as it is prejudicial to their investigating sense of truth, and perhaps even to their estimate of human nature. "For why", says Boaden in his writings on Shakespeare's sonnets, "why should we be so jealous of making the poet such a spotless creature as the world never saw! a being who so immeasurably surpasses us in mental gifts and who may not betray his race by the slightest moral fault? True, when repented error seduces not to imitation, it is better to stifle our presumption, whilst we show the greatest amongst us by no means stainless." At any rate we cannot do justice to the mind of the poet himself, to whom unfeigned truth was above all, unless in gathering together the characteristics of his life, we make him no better, than he has represented himself.

Shakespeare married in his nineteenth year Anna Hathaway, a young woman seven or eight years older than himself, the daughter of a wealthy freeholder in Shottonery near Stratford. Whether it were in consideration of the necessitous circumstances of the family, or the rashness of a violent passion, which urged to this early marriage, we know not. The young couple, married in the end of No-

vember 1582, had a daughter Susanna baptized as early as the 26th May 1583. From this circumstance Collier infers the latter cause, and perceives in it the main reason for the small degree of happiness, which according to these accounts, accompanied Shakespeare's married life. Others of Shakespeare's biographers have contradicted this consequence with the argument, that instances of such early births after marriage were at that time abundant, because the betrothment was regarded as the consummation of the marriage; but this custom itself would witness rather to the moral licence of the age, than to the moral restraint of the couple, who — always exceptionally — delighted in its freedoms; the sorry conclusions, which we draw from these evil auspices upon Shakespeare's domestic condition, would not be weakened by this plea. For Shakespeare's married life was undoubtedly no happy one. His wife brought him twins after two years, and they had no more children. When he soon after settled in London, he continued at least at first his free life, not merely judging from the sonnets; no regard to a dear wife and a happy family-circle appeared to restrain him. As Robert Greene kept his wife in Lincolnshire, Shakespeare also left his behind him in Stratford; he liked her better as the watcher over his economical circumstances at home, than as witness of his fame in the capital. He saw her again in his regular annual visits to Stratford, whither he returned, while yet full of vigour; but this was rather the proof of his sincere disinclination to the "public life" of the theatre, than a heartfelt inclination for his domestic life with his wife. In his will he only sparingly and meanly bequeathed to her his second best bed. In an economical and business point of view, we might indeed clear this strange disposition

from the reproach of neglect — since the widow of a freeholder was entitled by the law of the land to the dowry; but as regards the social relations of the couple, one sad token will ever remain, that the testator in his last will, in which he devotes a little remembrance to so many even non-relatives, mentioned none of the Hathaways, and leaves not a word of love for his wife. It is, therefore, indeed conceivable, if we give credit to bitter experiences in Shakespeare's married life; it is pardonable, if searching through his works we think to meet with direct out-bursts of feeling upon this portion of his history. Were the circumstances, which accompanied his marriage, the "fore-bemoaned moan" upon which the poet looked back repentantly in his sonnets? Was it accident, that just in his earlier Dramas the pictures of bad imperious women, such as he never subsequently depicted, filled his fancy? that in Henry VI. the traits of character with which the poet had endowed the terrible wives of the King and Gloster, when he worked at them later, he heightened with so many additions, as if to unburden his own heavy heart? With how much true conviction, as out of self-drawn experience, he utters the warning in "What you will". (II. 4.)

Let the woman take
An elder than herself; so wears she to him,
So sways she level in her husband's heart.

and with what sorrowful confession does he add the reason which reflects little honour on the man, why this proportion is the more natural one: —

For, however we do praise ourselves,
Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm,
More longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn,
Than women's are.

To Shakespeare's settlement in London, we shall return presently. He continued there, we have said, his dissipated life; at least, two anecdotes are told, which, if they are to be relied on, would prove it. On his journeys to and from London, wrote Aubrey about 1680, he would often put up at the crown at Oxford with John Davenant: He and his wife were fond of him; he stood godfather to their son William, and the evil world inferred more than friendship between the beautiful and witty Mrs. Davenant and the poet. One day the little William ran quickly home, and being asked, why he ran so, he replied, he wanted to see his godfather. "You are a good boy", said the interrogator, "but you must not needlessly use God's name". The young William Davenant subsequently made much of his acquaintance and relationship with Shakespeare, so that he has even been given the credit of having invented this story. Another is told by a contemporary Manningham about 1602, during the life-time of the poet. The wife of a London citizen carried away with admiration for Shakespeare's friend, Richard Burbadge, acting as Richard III., invited him one evening to her house, and told him to knock at the door under the name of Richard III. William Shakespeare heard the invitation, and knowing the word, anticipates his friend. Soon after his appearance a second Richard III. is announced. But the wanton possessor of the fair lady's company sends back his friend: William the Conqueror goes before Richard III.

These anecdotes may indeed seem mere inventions; the first may be truly only the application of a current witticism to the poet; historical legends often arise in this manner from retrospective conclusions from authentic facts.

Because Shakespeare was a poet, we might say, report originated that he killed his father's calves in "a high style" and made a speech at the time; because he was acquainted with hunting and horses, some make him a poacher, others a horseboy. So also that story of roguish wooing might have been imputed to the poet of the famous love-scene between Venus and Adonis. But as it is related by a contemporary, this seems less probable. Besides we do not readily impute such inventions to a character, which is considered honest and sober. Added to this, a poetical counterpart, as it were, to the last anecdote is to be found in those evil-esteemed sonnets, of which we spoke before.

The poet in those sonnets (127—152) depicts the singular woman, with whom he exchanged a sinful affection, as ugly, black in complexion, hair, and eyes, considered beautiful by none, with no charm for any physical sense. That which drew her to him, was her music, her intellectual grace, an aptness, which clothed the ugly with beauty, and raised in his eyes "the worst in her above all best." In vain he struggled against this passion, in vain with his reason, aye, even with his hate. For she ensnared his much-loved young friend, whom the remaining sonnets extol; but even this perfidy he forgave her, which seems to have been rather an act of wantonness, for the passion was not even returned; so that here it must be admitted we are looking upon a flippant and thus not tender intercourse between two lovers, such as the above-mentioned anecdote between Burbadge and Shakespeare would lead us to presume.

It is an unrestrained life, that Shakespeare led in his youthful years; to his poaching, to his love-adventures, is added his resolve, to separate himself from his family and

to become an actor; a step, which at that time no one readily took, who did not set universal opinion at defiance. He himself recognizes in his sonnets the "disgrace" and "blots" that clung to him; he confesses that he was continually renewing his "old offences of affections!" Had he not drunk so deeply of the cup of passion, scarcely would he with those master-touches have depicted the power of the sensuous courses, scarcely with that fervour and depth would he have pictured the charm of their allurements at the same time with the curse that lies in their excess. Had he not once crossed the threshold of crime, who can conceive, that he could so accurately and profoundly have penetrated into its inner recesses? Man issues from the hand of nature, endowed for good or for bad, and unfortunately predominant propensities have ever the hardest struggle. If the man comes out of this conflict victorious, he bears away with him a spoil, which without the conflict had been unattainable; the moderation to which he returns, is found by none who have not stumbled against extremes. The period in which Shakespeare lived was one in which natural and sensual power were strongly developed, but these were counterbalanced by religious habit, tenderness of conscience, and much intellectual vigour. As the time, so was the poet himself. He exulted when young in his physical energies, and spoke of himself in his early years as old, when he began to obey the dictates of his reason, and to follow out his intellectual impulses. Thus as Goethe and Schiller, early refined, withdrew from the dissolute habits of their youth and youthful associates; so did Shakespeare also: he consorted with his contemporaries Marlowe and Green at first as his equals, but he knew them, as his Prince Henry knew the wild com-

pany which pleased his youthful inclination and he discarded these habits like the prince, when he was called to better things. We shall later endeavour to learn from his personal poems, when this inner reformation in him took place. But if we may venture to gather the condition of his mind from his poems, written at different times in the paroxysm of passion, we should say, that he with Goethe, although in different combination, possessed that happy nature, which is endowed with moderation and self-command even in moments of passion, with a degree of composure even in the midst of tumult. Thus we shall see in the next chapter that in the two descriptive poems which we possess from his pen, the firstlings of his Muse, he exhibits this peculiar double-nature by an early proof. Both poems in form and matter correspond to this period of early passion, in which we have seen the poet, and originated in it. But the one, full of stoic severity, contrasts the power of the virtuous mind with the base rule of the senses, which is depicted in the other, full of tender charm. Still more distinctly drawn is the picture of the struggle between mind and sensuality, between reason and desire, as it must have shattered the poet himself, in the sonnets which are addressed to that unbeauteous charmer; in all of them he chides his easily befooled senses, and the conquered spirit scorns the conqueror Lust, without being able to raise itself from its defeat. The 129th of his sonnets expresses this frame of mind in the most striking manner :

Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame
 Is lust in action; and till action, lust
 Is perjured, murderous, bloody, full of blame,
 Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust;
 Enjoyed no sooner, but despised straight;

Past reason hunted, and no sooner had,
Past reason hated, as a swallow'd bait,
On purpose laid to make the taker mad:
Mad in pursuit, and in possession so;
Mad having, and in quest to have, extreme;
A bliss in proof, — and prov'd, a very woe;
Before, a joy proposed; behind, a dream.
All this the world well knows, yet none knows well,
To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.

SHAKESPEARE'S DESCRIPTIVE POEMS.

Of the two narrative or rather descriptive poems which we possess of Shakespeare, the one, *Venus and Adonis*, was first printed in the year 1593, the other, *Lucrece*, in 1594. Both are dedicated to the Earl of Southampton. The poet himself in his dedication calls *Venus and Adonis* his first work, but *Lucrece* belongs indisputably to the same period. Both poems were certainly revised at publication; their first conception may place them at a period previous to Shakespeare's settlement in London. Everything betrays that they were written in the first passion of youth.

How in matter and treatment they are interwoven with the youthful circumstances and moods of the poet, which we have hastily glanced at, strikes us at once. The subject of *Venus and Adonis* is the goddess of love wooing the cold, yet insensible boy, and her laments upon his sudden death. In the first part the poet has endowed the wooer with all the charms of persuasion, beauty, and passionate vehemence, with all the arts of flattery, entreaty, reproach, tears, and violence; and he appears in doing so as a *Cræsus* in poetic ideas, thoughts, and images, a master and victor in the matter of love, a giant in passion and sensual power. From this point

of view, the whole piece is one brilliant error, such as young poets so readily commit: immoderate sensual fervour mistaken for poetry. Yet in the opinion of the time this poem alone placed Shakespeare in the rank of admired poets. The very point, we mention, gave the poem at once its winning power. What at that time had been read in similar mythological poems by English and Italian writers of the nature and effects of love, was an elaborate ideal work in a polished form, more brilliant in words, than profound in truth of feeling. But here indeed Love is a "spirit, all compact of fire", a real paroxysm and passion, which surpasses the artificial bombastic manner of representation. Thus by its truth to nature, the poem had a realistic effect beyond any similar mythological and allegorical pictures; it was, like Goethe's Werther, proverbially upheld as the model of a love-poem, it was often reprinted and called forth a series of imitations; and poets praised it as "the quintessence of Love", as a talisman or a pattern for lovers, from which might be learned the art of successful wooing.

With whatever glowing colours Shakespeare has painted the image of this passion, his delight in the subject of his picture has never betrayed him into exclusive sensuality. He knows, that he sketched, not the image of human love in which mind and soul have their ennobling share, but the image of a purely sensual desire, which merely animal, like "an empty eagle", feeds on its prey. In the passage, where he depicts the wooing of Adonis' horse which had broken loose from its rein, his intention is evident to compare the animal passion in the episode with that of the goddess, not in opposition but in juxtaposition. Rebukingly Adonis tells the loving goddess, that she should not call

that love, which even he, the poet, names careless lust, "beating reason back, forgetting shame's pure blush, and honour's wrack." This purer thought, which more than once occurs in the poem, is yet, it must be admitted, half concealed by the grace of the style, and by the poet's lingering on sensual descriptions.

In *Lucrece* on the contrary, this purer thought lies in the subject itself, which seems intentionally to be selected as a counterpart to the first poem; — the poet places in opposition to the blindly idolized passion, the chastity of the matron, in whom strength of will and morality triumph in a tragic form over the conquest of lust. The representation of the insidious scene in *Lucrece* is not more modest or more cold; it might even appear that in the colouring of the chaste beauty there lay still more alluring warmth, than in any passage of *Venus and Adonis*. Yet the repentance and atonement of the heroine, the vengeance of her unstained soul, her death, these are treated in a totally different, in a more elevated tone and with corresponding emphasis. Indeed the poet in a more significant manner leaves the narrower limits of the description of a single scene in giving the situation of the heroine a great historical background. The solitary *Lucrece*, whilst she contemplates suicide, stands in meditation before a picture of the destruction of *Troy*, and the reader is led to observe the similar fate, which the fall of *Lucrece* brought upon the *Tarquinians* and the rape of *Helen* upon the family of *Priam*. If the poet in *Venus and Adonis*, led on by the tender art of *Ovid*, was occupied in presenting a merely voluptuous picture, which would have been a fitter subject for the painter, here we see him assuming a higher standard of morality, and evidently in-

cited by Virgil, casting a glance into that field of great and important actions, in which he afterwards became so eminent. To exhibit such contrasts, was a necessity of Shakespeare's versatile mind; they are a characteristic of his nature and his poetry; they appear here in the first beginnings of his art, and recur incessantly throughout all his dramatic works. Our own Goethe delighted in the repetition of one favourite form of character, which he reproduced only slightly changed in *Weisslingen* and *Werther*, in *Clavigo*, *Ferdinand*, and *Egmont*; this would have been impossible with Shakespeare. It lay in his nature to work out a given subject to that degree of perfection and completeness, which makes a recurrence to it difficult, and rather invites to a path with a directly opposite aim.

To him who only knows Shakespeare through his dramas, these two poems present in their structure something quite strange. Whilst there in the form of speech everything tends to actions, here in the form of narrative every thing tends to speeches. Even where an opportunity occurs, all action is avoided; in *Venus and Adonis* not even the boar's hunt is recounted; in *Lucrece* the eventful cause and consequence of the one described scene is scarcely mentioned; in the description of this situation itself, all is lost in rhetoric. *Before* his deed, Tarquin in a lengthy reflection holds "disputation 'tween frozen conscience and hot burning will"; *after it*, Lucrece in endless soliloquy inveighs against Tarquin, night, opportunity, and time, and loses herself in vague reflections as to her suicide. Measured according to the standard of nature observed in the other works of the poet, this would be the height of unnaturalness in a woman of modest retirement and cold will. That which

in Shakespeare's dramas so wonderfully distinguishes his soliloquies, the art of compressing infinite sentiments within a few grand outlines, is here exhibited in perfect contrast. Only two small touches do we meet with in Lucrece, the places where she questions the maid upon Tarquin's departure, and asks for "paper, ink, and pen", although they are near her; and where she sends away the groom, who blushes from bashfulness, — but as *she* believes — "to see her shame", — in these passages the psychological poet, such as we know him, glances forth. Everywhere besides, in this more important of the two poems, his representation of Lucrece suffers from an inner lack of truth, and the faulty structure of the Italian pastoral poetry. Its distinctive characteristic are those so-called conceits, strange and startling ideas and images, profound thoughts lavished on shallow subjects, sophistry and artificial wit in the place of poetry, imagination directed to logical contrasts, acute distinctions, and epigrammatic points. The poet here works after a pattern which he surpasses in redundancy, he takes a false track with his accustomed superiority, he tries an artistic mannerism, and carries it beyond its originators. He carries it to a height, where he himself, as it were, becomes conscious of the extravagant excess, the strange alternation of sublimity and flatness, which is peculiar to this style. This impression is made by the passage, where Lucrece writes the letter to her husband and passes her criticisms upon it:

This is too curious-good, this blunt and ill:
 Much like a press of people at a door
 Throng her inventions, which shall go before.

In one of his earliest comedies, "Love's Labour Lost", Shakespeare repudiates this kind of style. There in the

person of Biron, while he designates most excellently the peculiarities of this kind of poetry, he bids farewell to the

Taffata phrases, silken terms precise,
 Three pil'd hyperboles, spruce affection,
 Figures pedantical: these summer-flies
 Have blown me full of maggot ostentation.

And, indeed, it was just in the amatory style, to which these peculiarities especially belonged, that Shakespeare first and for ever discarded them; and whilst no poetry was ever so decidedly conventional as this conceit-poetry of the Italian school, none is more opposed to this conventionality than the Shakespeare drama. In many passages of his works, something of the false glitter of the art yet remains; in many parts he used it purposely for some definite aim. In his tragic pathos, especially, he has been reproached with degenerating into pomposity and bombast. And it is certain that he sincerely delighted in the grandiloquence of Seneca and in the glowing style of Virgil. The admiration of the account of Pyrrhus' death, which he places in the lips of such a judge as Hamlet, leaves us no doubt of it. Lucrece bears the same character of diction in many parts. No German can read this poem, without being reminded of Schiller's attempt to translate Virgil into stanzas. The delight of the young scholars in the roman master was similar and proceeded from similar causes: upon youth, the grandiloquent makes a greater impression of the heroic, than the even grandeur of Homer; in the schools the latin type of epic art is more readily received than the greek; thus Goethe cherished a preference for Virgil, until he had read Homer with greater ease in German. It is for this reason, that

Shakespeare was a Virgilian even in his sympathies ; as in Lucrece in the freshness of early impressions, so at a later period is he always on the side of the Trojans in all allusions to the great homeric myth ; and we must remember, that according to the legends, the ancient Britons are descended from the Trojans, and that this illustrious pedigree was held in remembrance in dramatic poems ; in one of Shakespeare's last works, Troilus and Cressida, we must keep clearly before us those early youthful feelings, if we would understand the poem.

That a poet of such common sense as Shakespeare, should, in the beginning of his career, fall into this over-refinement of art, in which he reminds us of a Marini and a Hoffmannswaldau, is much easier to conceive, than that he could so quickly abandon it, in order to point out to all futurity the path of nature. We must remember, that the chivalric poetry of the middle age was an art of conventionality, which in the 15th century in all parts of western Europe degenerated into crudeness and unnaturalness. From this crudeness it was rescued by the far-famed Italian epic poets, who studied in the 16th century from the works of the ancients ; but the want of nature in the matter, which they obtained from the romances of chivalry, they could not overcome ; they endeavoured in vain to form a pure work of art out of a basely chiselled statue. The more rapidly, however, in the 10th century that chivalry and knightly customs declined, the more quickly was interest lost in the subject of those Italian masters, Ariosto and Tasso, and admiration rested alone on their excellent structure, their harmonious versification, and their refined, courtly language. Poetry had become subjectless, and the form was now the highest point, at which they

aimed. But when the technical in art becomes the principal thing, the form soon becomes over-refined, and at the same time human nature, the subject and theme of poetry, becomes falsified. Matter and form, the poetical expression as well as the contemplation of human nature, are then fashioned according to an arbitrary law; conventionality and not nature dictates the poet's path. The extremest point of this psychologic and æsthetic unnaturalness was reached by the allegorical and pastoral poetry of the Spanish and Italian poets of the 16th century, which occupied in its full extent the vacant place of the fast vanishing chivalric epos. The pastoral romances of Ribeyro, of Saa de Miranda, Sannazar and Montemayor ruled the world; the *Diana* of the last writer was admired, circulated, and enlarged as much Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*. No wonder, that this taste, now penetrated also into England, where Italian literature had already once in Chaucer's time exercised influence, where the Italian lyric not long before Shakespeare's had been introduced by Sir Thomas Wyatt and his friend, the noble earl of Surrey. As Chaucer adopted Boccaccio, and Surrey Petrarca, so Sir Philip Sidney, who died in the year that Shakespeare came to London, introduced pastoral poetry into England; his *Arcadia* is an equal imitation of Sannazar and Montemayor. Men such as these, Surrey and Sidney, were quite calculated to prepare a new era for poetry in England. It was just the period when the Reformation created a favourable atmosphere for all cultivation, when scholastic philosophy was losing ground in the schools, when antiquity and its literature was revived, and through the art of printing a general sympathy had been diffused for all literature. Already at the court of

Henry VIII. had witty amusements, plays and masks, been made a vehicle for the lively drawn allegory and pastoral poem; but under Elizabeth bloomed indeed the golden age of revived art and knowledge, under the fostering hand of a queen, who was herself a lover of the fine arts, was learned in language and music, read greek and latin authors, and herself made dilettante attempts in lyric poems. Now streamed towards England the admired art of the South, without meeting with any resistance in a national literature, promoted by a new, cultivated, and art-loving nobility, who since Henry VIII., like those small Italian princes, and those Spanish grandees of the 16th century, took art and literature under their own protection and peculiar care.

To this class of men, with whom art ennobled life, and life dignified art, belonged that unfortunate Surrey, who in the bloom of years fell a sacrifice to the snares of Lord Hertford and the tyranny of Henry VIII. To the same class also belonged the short-lived Wyatt, whom report and even his own poems placed in suspicion of having had a connection with the royal Anna Boleyn; and Philip Sidney, over whose equally early grave the laments of admiring scholars were poured forth in all tongues. To it also belonged that Raleigh, the famous naval hero, who like Surrey died guiltless on the scaffold; Lord Vaux, Thomas Sackville, Earl of Dorset, Oxford, Pembroke and Southampton, the two latter contemporaries of Shakespeare's. A ray of poetry fell, as we see, upon the life of several of these nobles. Their influence was extraordinary, and their taste ruled the English literature. The sublimity of the Petrarchian lyric, the purity of versification, the courtly refinement of taste after the Italian model, emanated from

them, but in its train also was brought in that unnaturalness and distortion, which belonged to their pattern. Sidney's and Raleigh's favourite was Edmund Spenser, whose *Faerie Queene* delighted those of his own and of a later day, by the harmony of its verse and the bright colouring of its poetic pictures. With Surrey arose a multitude of sonnet-writers and Petrarchists, extending to Shakespeare's youth. Among their number was Daniel, a protégé of the Earl of Pembroke, whose mother was a sister of Sidney, and herself a poet; Drayton a favourite of the Earl of Dorset. Their lyric poems bear the character of the Italian style; in the English sonnets of that day, even in Shakespeare's, we are offended everywhere by subtleties, quibbles, ingenuities, peculiar to that pastoral style of poetry. Many of these poets drew directly from the source of Italian art: Daniel wrote his sonnets in Italy, Rich, the translator of Italian tales, the dramatists Lilly and Green, the actor Kempe belonging to Shakespeare's company, had been themselves in Italy. Thus it was that England in the 16th century was inundated with Italian lyrics, pastorals, allegories, dramas, and tales, that in opposition to the rising drama was the declining epic, a foreign to a native art, a learned and aristocratic style to a national taste. It was a cosmopolitan, a wide-spread literature, which had for support the weight of half Europe; the taste and the prejudice of courts, of the refined world, of the learned and the cultivated.

In the midst of these circumstances Shakespeare appeared; how was it possible that he should not have revered this taste and this school of art? His non-dramatical works, his sonnets, and the two poems we are con-

sidering, place him among the number of those clients of the nobles, those scholars trained in a foreign school, those lyric and epic poets, at whose head stands Edmund Spenser. If we possessed nothing from Shakespeare but these poems, we should read him among the Draytons, Spensers, and Daniels, and not a doubt would have arisen over the nobility and dignity of his school and education. Both mentioned poems betray in matter and title the learned Latin school; in their treatment of the old myths and stories, in the evident traces of the influence of Virgil, they seem to bespeak a poet who was not superficially acquainted with the poetic art of the ancients; a learned and competent contemporary (Meres) said of them in rapturous praise, that in "the honey-tongued poet lived the sweet witty soul of Ovid". But in his sonnets he indisputably attained to the poetic gloss and depth of thought of the best Italian sonnet-writers more than any of his numerous rivals in England. Towards many of those men, towards several of their noble patrons he stood in some literary or personal connection. To the Earl of Southampton he dedicated the two poems we have discussed; he must have known Sir Walter Raleigh, for he visited in London the club founded by him in Friday street. Edmund Spenser, probably a Warwickshire man, was among the first to reverence Shakespeare's genius, whom as early as 1594, after his first tragic attempts, he extols under the pastoral name Aëtion, with an allusion to his warlike name, because his "Muse, full of high thoughts' invention, doth, like himselfe, heroically sound". To Daniel's sonnets those of Shakespeare exhibit the greatest inner affinity, and even outwardly the form is imitated of the three stanzas and the concluding couplet; from Daniel's

Rosamond, Shakespeare borrowed the seven-lined stanza of his *Lucrece*. Cunningham has discovered in the 21st of Shakespeare's sonnets, evident allusions to those of Drayton, and comparing the sonnets 80 to 83, it is indisputable that Shakespeare intended by him the "better spirit" who threatened to deprive him of the favour of the friend and patron, to whom his sonnets are addressed. With this Warwickshire man also may Shakespeare have felt the bond of fellow-citizenship. Everywhere we see him in the closest contact with this school of poetry, in personal association with the nobles who fostered and protected it, in greater or less accordance with its poetic tendency. It is later that we first meet with proofs in his dramas, that he reformed the taste for the southern lyric, and exchanged for it the delight in the homely sincerity of national Saxon song. But at that time, he stood forth in full maturity, the people's poet, who had forsaken the learned and courtly art, the national poet, who had cast the foreign school into shadow, the dramatic poet, who made epics forgotten, — Shakespeare, who had eclipsed Spenser and all his contemporaries.

SHAKESPEARE IN LONDON AND ON THE STAGE.

Shakespeare left his native town Stratford in the year 1586, or at the latest, in 1587, 22—23 years old. Whether he did so to obtain a better lot for his needy family by the exercise of his talents, or, as one tradition tells us, to escape the prosecution of Sir Thomas Lucy, or as another asserts, out of love for poetry and dramatic art, is not to be determined. Nothing seems more natural than that all three motives co-operated, in calling forth the determination so decisive for his future life.

That in a man of this rapid maturity of mind, the gift as well as the love of poetry and the drama was early awakened, is a matter of course. Food and nurture for it he found without difficulty in his native town and county. Since 1569, thus from the time of his earliest youth, companies of "Players" belonging to the earls of Leicester, Warwick, Worcester, and others, performed almost yearly at Stratford in the course of their travels through the kingdom. But what might have still more prompted Shakespeare's resolve to become an actor, was, that several of the players with whom he was afterwards acquainted, came originally from Warwickshire. One

Thomas Greene, of the Earl of Leicester's company, was from Stratford itself; Heminge, the friend of Shakespeare and the Editor of his works, Slye, Tooley, probably also Thomas Pope, were from the same county. James Burbadge, the builder of the Blackfriars theatre, left this county for London, a man, who in the history of the English drama has the significance of our own Koch, Ackermann, and similarly enterprising talents in Germany, and his famous son Richard, was the literary confidant of Shakespeare. How easily may he not thus have early formed a connection with one or other of these men; how easily may not his poetic talent even in Stratford have excited their attention, and even there opened the way to the early fame and rapid success which followed immediately on his bold resolve to settle in the capital.

We must here interrupt our account of Shakespeare's life and literary career, in order to learn the circumstances by which he was surrounded in London on his entrance upon his new calling. We will as briefly as possible, that we may not leave the poet too long, tell when and how dramatic poetry was developed in England, how the stage arose and progressed, in what state Shakespeare found both, — the poetic and histrionic art, how the company which he entered, stood in relation to other dramatic concerns, and what position he himself, earlier and later, occupied in the same.

DRAMATIC POETRY BEFORE SHAKESPEARE.

It is far from our intention, to treat the history of the English drama before Shakespeare in a comprehensive

manner. It would even with the greatest prolixity, afford no clear picture to the German reader, because all history of literature suffers from the disadvantage of being alone comprehended when the main sources are studied side by side with it, which in this case cannot be demanded from the German public. We will therefore only consider the dramatic poetry before Shakespeare, from the one point of view: what it offered to our poet, what his dramatic art owes to the poetry of earlier times, and could or must have borrowed from it. In so doing, we shall perceive that only in the most general sense, but in this to a great extent, could he have obtained anything from the past history of the English stage. There was not either before or in his time, a single dramatist of decided value, to whom he could have looked as a model. He learned the profession from the masses of existing plays; essentially his own teacher, he conceived the true idea of the art out of the striving efforts of scholars, among whom was no master. We shall therefore be spared the trouble of burdening our readers with many names; we shall arrange in distinct groups the performances of dramatic art before and during the time of Shakespeare, and seek to draw from each the result, which mere transmission consigned to and habit imposed upon the poet. By this means this advantage will be gained, that throughout a connecting link will be shown, which unites Shakespeare's poetry with those different groups, and that thus, while we gather from thence elucidations for Shakespeare, a light from this poet so well known to the reader, may be reflected upon those fields, which are unknown to him.

The drama has everywhere had a religious origin. As in ancient times it arose from the sacred chorus, so in christian.

ages it sprung principally from the Easter festival. The Catholic passion-rites with which Good Friday was celebrated, the image of the crucified laid in the grave, and again on Easter Sunday raised for the feast of the resurrection, were called Mysteries. During the middle ages this name was given to the sacred plays, which in all parts of Europe formed the commencement of the modern drama; their primitive subject was always the representation of the passion, sufferings, and death of Christ, and their origin thus essentially belonged to those religious rites. So in St. Peter's at Rome at the present day on Good Friday the history of the Passion from the Gospel is sung in recitative in allotted parts, and in this performance one feels absolutely transported to the commencement of the later drama. Cloister and church were therefore the first theatres, priests the first actors, the first dramatic matter was the passion, the first dramas were the Mysteries. These representations extended in time over manifold subjects; now a miracle-play would be performed in honour of the Saints on their feast days, now at the greater christian festivals, at Whitsuntide and Corpus Christi, a more comprehensive mystery, which comprised the mysterious relations of the creation and the fall to the life and death of Jesus, and in one great picture of perhaps 30 to 40 single plays, united a series of old-testament scenes with the representation of the work, sufferings, and death of Christ, into one immense whole, which required three, four, even eight days for its performance. Soon these sacred dramas found their way from the church to the street, from the clergy to the laity, then to the artisans, who practised a miracle-play for the feast of their patron saint, or allotted among themselves the single pageants of the mysteries, ac-

ording as their purport referred to their trade. Subsequently actors and jugglers by profession took possession of these plays, which became, as it were, stationary in London, were carried about in the country to all fairs and markets in town and village, and continued till Shakespeare's time.

If we consider that these miracle-plays, undisturbed by every other kind of dramatic art, circulated among the people and took root among them for many hundred years, upheld by the delight of the masses in spectacles, and inwardly supported by the unapproachably sacred material, we augur at once that a habit so long fostered even in its early, rough, and artless beginning, would impose a law on the later drama even for the period of its artistic perfection, a law, which the boldest genius would only cast aside, at the risk of frightening away the people whom he sought to attract. The epic character of the modern drama was determined by the early and for a long time exclusive matter of the sacred plays, the historical mode of treatment was enjoined, the rich fulness of the material was imposed. The greek Drama arose in juxtaposition to the perfect Epic of Homer, and could not have attempted to vie with it in the representation of lengthened, varied, polymythical action. The praise of the ancient drama could be no other than that which Aristotle gave it: with small means it produced the effect of the stately epos. It lighted, in a happy contrast, upon the representation of simple limited actions and catastrophes. The modern period, on the contrary, when it lay for centuries brooding over the elements of the drama, had no imposing epos before it; the Drama arose out of the gospel-story, and later out of chivalric poems and historical chronicles full of facts and action; moreover from the first sacred material of

the Bible nothing was to be abridged; not a crumb of this precious food was to be lost; rather the brief gospel narrative demanded amplification. All these sources required in their nature and condition, the extent of form and the fulness of material, which has become the property of the modern drama. This result was already long determined, when Shakespeare began to write. And he certainly would not have wished to oppose this law, which the age and the nation had created, which tradition and custom had sanctioned, when even a Lope de Vega, when even, in a much more advanced age, our own Schiller had the discernment to perceive, that with an enforced imitation of the classic Drama the ground of efficiency itself would be destroyed, that every national character has its particular development, every age its peculiarity, every tradition its right, and that a poet, who will make himself worthy of transmission, should have a careful regard for this right and for that course of development.

This kind of sacred drama with which the history of the English stage begins, had as far as the 15th century, when it reached its greatest extent, no important competitor. About this period a second group of allegorical dramas, which had their origin in the schools, competed with the former and finally took its place. The so-called Moralities, in their original form of an essentially religious nature, bear on the Mysteries, just as much as the mystical allegories of the middle ages did on the allegorical interpretations of the poetical harmony of the gospel, which preceded them; they treat of the substance of the Christian story, which the miracle-play represents in acting imitation of the events, in abstract precepts, in metaphorical, allegorical, and scenic performances.

Already in the Miracles, single allegorical figures had taken part in the play, Death, Truth, Justice, and others; in the Moralities, these and other conceptions appear, human feelings, passions; crimes, and virtues are personified, and form exclusively the acting or rather speaking personages of this lifeless drama. The central point of the Mysteries, the sacrifice of Christ, the redemption from the Fall, is in moral abstraction the struggle between good and evil, and this is, in general, the subject which these abstract pieces, the Moralities, touch upon. The strife of the virtuous and sinful powers for influence over the human nature is the uniform theme of the oldest Moralities, which have been discovered in England. By degrees the matter of these pieces left the religious sphere and approached nearer real life. The struggle between good and evil principle is now rather viewed from the point of universal morals, the doctrine now turns against all worldliness, against every dependence on outward blessings, which in opposition to intellectual and moral possessions, appear as emanations from the principle of evil. If the Mysteries were only barren action, and with little infusion of reflection, so on the other hand the moral lesson is the beginning, middle, and end of these pieces, which without action and motion are drawn out in solemn stiff Dialogues of lifeless phantoms. It is, as if they seek to open the inner eye, to unfold the thought, that in the apparent design of the drama a deep spiritual purport may be deposited. With this aim they confine themselves to the most spiritual treatment of their spiritual subject; they avoid the graces of diverting actions; of Horace's union of the beautiful and the useful, they grant poetry the useful alone.

With the same energy, as the miracles, so rich in story, directed the growing Drama to the representation of action, the Moralities, which so openly exhibited the didactic character, gave it, by their moral teaching an ethical tendency. As this style, which continued prevalent in England through the whole 15th century, lasted likewise till Shakespeare's time and long after him, we can easily imagine, how forcibly the necessity of a higher range of thought, a moral direction in the drama, must have impressed itself upon the poets. As long as the drama in England was no profession, dramatic works were therefore regarded and created from a moral point of view.

In that healthful natural age, which had not yet divided life nor sought to separate morality, mind, and art, the dramatic poets of England were all united in the principle, that it was the vocation of the drama to ennoble morals, however often a mistaken application and practice might err against the good theory. They hit upon this principle and clung to it from the simplest of all grounds: because the subject of their dramas was action and nothing but action; for actions are not conceivable without ethical conditions, unless they be such as moral philosophy itself calls indifferent actions, but which are then much more indifferent to art than to morality. Sir Philip Sidney had already extolled the first English tragedy, *Ferrex and Porrex*, in that sense of Horace, on account of its representation of the moral in the form of the beautiful. And in Shakespeare's time, men such as Massinger, Ford, Ben Jonson, and Thomas Heywood expressly and emphatically gave to the stage the high vocation of uniting grace with purity of morals, and

they justified the works of dramatic art by their ethical aims.* And in this spirit of the more serious and severe tendency of the English Drama, Shakespeare, elevated far above his companions, and reflecting upon the deepest concerns of human nature and its relations, formed his dramas on that great principle, that it is the first and last aim of this art, "to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time its form and pressure"; he pressed forward to that artistic height where one common and spiritual idea rules each of his works, and so pervades it, that it invests the visible form of action with an invisible but all-forming, all-animating soul. However infinitely removed from this high point of art were those Mysteries, in which the poetic power was yet too small to suffer

* In his apology for actors Heywood imputes to Melpomene the following significant words:

Am I Melpomene, the buskin'd muse,
 That held in awe the tyrants of the world,
 And playde their lives in publiek theaters,
 Making them fear to sinne, since fearlesse I
 Prepar'd to wryte their lives in crimson inke,
 And act their shames in eye of all the world?
 Have not I whipt Vice with a scourge of steele,
 Unmaskt sterne Murther, sham'd lascivious Lust?
 Pluct off the visar from grimme Treasons face,
 And made the sunne point at their ugly sinnes?
 Hath not this powerfull hand tam'd fiery rage,
 Kild poysonous Envy with her owne keene darts,
 Choak't up their covetous mouth with moulten gold,
 Burst the vast wombe of eating Gluttony,
 And drownd the drunkards gall in juice of grapes?
 I have showed Pryde his picture on a stage,
 Layde ope the ugly shapes his steele-glasse hid,
 And made him passe thence meekely.

the near-lying thought to glance forth from the action, and those Moralities, which, on the other hand, knew not how to clothe the thought with a real bodily action, we may yet understand that just the strict one-sided development of these different elements of the Drama was qualified to facilitate its future blending and to hinder the evaporation of one or other elements in their union.

The sacredness of the Mysteries, the spirituality of the Moralities, the ideal loftiness of both, appeared to demand a contrast, the representation of real common life, if the elements of the Drama were fully to assimilate. If those more highly sustained elements of the Drama originated in church and school, this contrast of the comic and burlesque, in its first independent dramatic form, was to originate in the court. Since the courtly art of the Troubadours and Minnesingers in the 12th and 13th centuries, singers, story-tellers, minstrels, bards, jugglers, and merry-makers had collected round the princely patrons of art. The necessity for intellectual, musical entertainment, of a reflective or comic nature, centred thus in the courts. In rough, warlike times, as in the 14th century, these people were thrown more into the back-ground; in milder times as in the 15th century, they again emerged everywhere. If there had been anywhere in Europe a peaceful refuge, where they had found shelter, they wandered again from thence out into all the world, for their art in spite of the difference of language was a common property. Thus we know that in the 15th century German poets carried their art to Denmark and Norway, Bavarian and Austrian court-minstrels to England. Jugglers, players, court-fools, and singers thus became the immediate originators and guardians of the love of spectacle,

which since the 14th century had superseded the more modest delight of listening to the song of the poet. Pleasure in all possible spectacles, in disguises, and mummeries, became at this period universal. There was no festivity, no visit to or reception at courts and towns, where for the honour of the guests', costly dressed, allegorical or historical personages did not appear; no great banquet, where a pantomime, a pageant, tableaux-vivants with scene and shifting, were not represented. From France came over to England those dumb plays, the interludes (*entremets*) as early indeed as Edward III. reign. Under Henry VIII. these pageants were more formally exhibited; costly disguises and masks were usual at that time; banquets at court and in private were interrupted by interludes. Thus in Henry VIII. the poet, following an historical tradition, has introduced the king as he and his suite surprised Cardinal Wolsey in a pastoral mask. The allegory predominated in all these amusements: the simple pleasure of the disguise led to it, and in pastoral plays and court-masks of all kinds, it may as early, indeed earlier, have received a dramatic perfection, than in the Moralities. But it was precisely in the festivities of the court that the Drama then stepped forth from the allegory, from the dead generality, into the details of actual life. One John Heywood, a learned man, originally a player on the spinet, a witty companion and epigrammatist, wrote in 1520 at the court of Henry VIII. a series of interludes, which laid aside the allegory, and turned in the most real manner upon the most ordinary affairs of life, without repudiating the instructive tendency, which is only moderated by jest and irony. The little that is left of this interlude, is only upon a somewhat higher scale than

the dramatic drolleries of Hans Sachs. There are no exact pieces, not even scenes, which evolve an action, but rather only comical dialogues and disputes, taken from low and common life, enlivened by droll, rude, and healthful popular wit, and sometimes wearisome and tedious from unseasonable diffuseness. We know that this Heywood formed a kind of epoch with his comic court-plays: we can therefore easily imagine that similar plays imitated in the lower stratum of society, among burghers and rustics, would prove infinitely more clumsy. We shall then readily believe that the spectacle or pageant of the nine Worthies, which the good Armado performs in *Love's Labour's Lost*, and the "tedious brief Scene" of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, are caricatures, which are not far removed from the actual occurrence. We know still of a Henry Goldingham, who was to represent Arion in a water-play before queen Elizabeth, that he revealed himself in the same way as, in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Bottom proposes to Snug, who is to act the Lion. But how delighted was this age even with trifles! an age of which that might be said, in a universal sense, which Shakespeare puts into the mouth of Theseus: that it took "the best in this kind only for shadows: and the worst for no worse, if imagination amend them." We read in the present day, though we know not what to make of it, at the conclusion of *What you will*, the clown's jig, a song which he had to chant dancing with drum and pipes; but with such simple metrical compositions, recited drolleries and farces with comic refrains, solo-parts without dialogue, Tarlton, Elizabeth's court-jester enchanted the most refined public in London even at a period, when the stage was advancing towards perfection. For these farces

were performed with that gravity of dry humour, which moves the most melancholic, and makes Democritus out of Heraclitus.

No branch of the Drama was so early developed in England, from none has Shakespeare received more, and learned so directly, as from these farces of the jesters of the court and people. Wit and fancy, humour and satire, in the realistic 16th century, which brought its coarse nature in rude contrast to the boasted stateliness of the later chivalry of the 15th, was one common possession of the European world. The Rabelais, the Cervantes, the Hans Sachs, and Fischart, the poets of the Italian burlesque, belonged to that period; numerous popular jesters, the children of a native mother-wit, conveyed this property to the lower classes; there is a whole world of truth in the occasional observation of Shakespeare, that at this period the toe of the peasant came so near the heel of the courtier, he galls his kibe. But in no land did this popular wit appear in such concentrated power and such extensive diffusion, as among the Saxon race in England. This character must of necessity be reflected in the dramatic art; and thus the droll figures of unconscious humour, the clowns, which were called in Germany natural fools (*natürliche Narren*), which Shakespeare also by the name *natural* distinguished from the fine court-fools, who with conscious wit lashed at folly, these droll figures were the favourites of the public theatre at that period, and even in our own day the chord is still touched, when in London the Dogberrys and Clowns of this sort appear upon the stage. In no branch is Shakespeare more indebted to the past, in none less original than in this, although to us Germans it is just the properties of

the comic figures and their jests, which appear as his most distinguishing peculiarity.

In the divisions in which we have represented the mysteries, the moralities, and the comic interludes, and in the pure exclusive character of their original nature and form, these pieces did not long remain. In many ways they mingled or joined together; new elements, ingredients, lower degrees of the drama, were added to the two first styles, or were developed out of them. The Mysteries especially, if we consider them in the perfect form, which they reached in the 15th century, have within them not alone the nature of the historical drama, not alone the elements of the Moralities, but the comic interlude and the carnival merrymaking originated in their very substance and purport. The secular scenes, which are joined to the history of the Passion, the announcement to the Shepherds, the denial of Peter and others, gave rise to humorous and burlesque treatment, and the Mysteries like the Easter-feast itself, in the extravagance of Lent and the severe festival of the Easter-week, soon contained in themselves the elements of the comic and the sublime side by side. Just so, the serious allegoric interlude, either spoken or merely acted, grew out of the original matter of the Miracle. At all times prophetic applications to gospel history were sought for in the stories of the old testament; thus the Mysteries inserted, at opportune passages in the representation of the history of the Passion, an interlude, which treated of the corresponding matter in the old testament: thus after the scene of Christ's betrayal through Iscariot, the typical story of the selling of Joseph followed in an Intermezzo; expressed in few words like the interlude in Hamlet; or it was represented in a

pantomime, a dumb play, a tableau, as appears in *Pericles* and in a number of secular Dramas in Shakespeare's time. And like the Mysteries, the Moralities soon stepped out of their severe original form. As soon as they had emerged from the religious sphere into the moral, it was probable, that they would venture a step further into citizen life. The classes of society now appeared personified; the purport became rather practical morality and criticism of daily life; satirical allusions to passing events, persons, circumstances, were added; church and state affairs were dramatized. In the reign of Henry VIII. the Moralities, the now prevailing kind of Drama, became, as it were, the receptacle for dramatic composition of every kind. The allegorical figures, the symbolic treatment, the moral tendency, still held its ground, when the Drama of the church and the schools, the Mysteries and Moralities, ever more gave way to the independent, artistic, secular Drama; the different kinds blended; there are romantic plays and historical dramas in England, which are full of elements of the Moralities. But where the blending of the different kinds appears most glaring and at the same time most frequent, is in the combination of the vulgar and the burlesque with the sublime and the pathetic. In the midst of the serious matter of those religious pieces and in the solemn dogmatic tone of the moral ones, comic elements had early penetrated. In the French and German Mysteries they were limited to the interludes; in the English, the national element in the coarsest comic scenes, pervaded, wherever it was allowable, the evangelic, but more frequently the old-testament matter, and gave indeed to these sacred pieces the natural realistic character, which remained the distinguishing feature of the English

stage. The usual comic character in the miracle-plays acted the devil in ridiculous and terrific form. In the moralities he appears usually associated with Vice, a figure upon which, in not a few passages of Shakespeare's plays, allusions occur, which are for the most part lost in the German translation. Vice appears here expressly as a fool and jester, in a long variegated dress, with wooden dagger, carrying on his sport with men and with his hellish subject. We remember that this mode of thinking, which regarded the principle of evil at once as the type of the ridiculous, and human sinfulness as folly, passed entirely over Europe in the 15th and 16th century. Evil became thus in this merry age rather exposed to derision than to repentance. The most serious moral doctrine and the coarsest manner of comic representation thus went hand in hand. Thus far the comic element was ever bound with the peculiar matter and subject of the plays. But even this did not satisfy. The laughter-loving age desired greater stimulant; they inserted merry, humorous jests, fighting scenes, droll interludes, into the stiff action of the Moralities, which had not the slightest reference to the real subject. This practice was transferred afterwards to the regular Drama likewise, and thus in the first English tragedies the most extravagant jests were intermingled, which in no wise belonged to the main action, but which served the mere end of exciting laughter. But even with this also, they were not contented. They allowed the fool to conclude the play with absurd jigs, to fill up the time between the acts with jests, and in his part to permit all extravagances of improvisation. Philip Sidney complains in his Apology of poetry over this unsuitable practice of "mingling kings and fools, not because

the matter so carrieth it, but thrusting in the clown by head and shoulders, to play a part in majistical matters with neither decency nor discretion; so as neither the admiration and commiseration, nor right sportfulness is by their mongrel tragi-comedy obtained”.

This mixture also of various elements, Shakespeare unhesitatingly accepted as a legacy of the age: he felt that he could change the passive debts in this inheritance into active stock, that he could new-stamp the defects into as many virtues. In his most admired pieces, in the Merchant of Venice, in Lear, and Cymbeline, he has brought side by side a two-fold action, but through the deep inner union, which he ever knew how to give to it, he has more than doubled the æsthetic, not less than the ethical value of these works. His contemporaries and fellow-dramatists were unequal to maintain this stage of art-intelligence. The Dramas of his whole company, predecessors, and successors, from Lilly to Fletcher, are full of double, even of three-fold actions, but it is rather exception than rule, and seems to be almost more chance than design, if they happen to have reference to each other; even the pieces, where unity is regarded, are often only dramatic scenes without a dramatic central point. With respect to the practice of intermingling jesting elements in a serious action, the dramatists around Shakespeare knew just as little what course to take, even when they regarded it as a bad habit. With almost all, comic scenes insinuated themselves, without any essential and distinct bearing, into the main action, from which without injury they could be dissevered, with Lilly and Heywood even in antique mythological material. Marlowe suited himself to this taste of the age, although he wished to avoid it; he wrote his

"Tamburlaine" (1586) in the declared intention of carrying his readers from the fancy of jigs and buffoonery to the serious development of an exciting historical and political action. Nevertheless he inserted for the people the usual comic scenes even against his own inclination: his publisher afterwards omitted them in the printing of "Tamburlaine", because they detracted from so "honourable and distinguished a history". Not so did Shakespeare proceed. Unrelentingly he banished from the stage the extreme buffoonery of the fools and their unseasonable freedoms. When he mixed the king and the fool, jest and earnestness, tragic and comic parts, he did so on the condition, on which even Sidney, the lover of the antique, seemed to approve of it, that the matter itself demanded it. He accommodated himself to the popular taste only in the conviction, that even to this peculiarity of the rude stage he could give a more refined turn. He developed the character of the fool for comedy in the cleverest manner, and knew how to use it also for the most tragic effects. He has not disdained the broadest caricature, not however only to excite laughter, but as a means of conveying the profoundest reflexions upon human life. He has sketched the most grotesque scenes, but he knew how to link with them the most sublime matter. While his droll conceits appear for the most part jests indulged in for their own sake, a touch of contrast or of the necessary characterization, combines them ever with the main action of the piece. In the play where fool and king are thrown into the closest intercourse (Henry and Falstaff), this situation itself forms the plot of the piece.

Till the reign of Henry VIII. and even as far as the early part of that of Elizabeth, the English stage had no

special theatre, and no votaries by profession, or if it had, they had no regular duties; there were neither poets nor actors, who were exclusively devoted to this one work. But under Henry VIII. the dramatic elements began to collect and to form. The first traces of players by profession, who travelled about the kingdom, is seen in the reign of Henry VI., the first of the English kings who patronised literature, after the warlike race of the Edwards and Henrys had passed away. Under Edward IV. Henry Bourchier, afterwards Earl of Essex, maintained a company of players, and the cruel Richard III. had, when Duke of Gloucester, a set of actors, of whom it appears doubtful, whether they were singers or actors, or both united. But as soon as the national peace was established under Henry VII., there were to be found at court two different organized companies of royal actors, and several nobles, the dukes of Buckingham, Northumberland, Oxford, Norfolk, Gloucester, and others, had players in their service, who at times performed at court, and travelled under the name and protection of their patrons. Thus they diffused their art through the country, so that soon even in the larger towns, established companies of actors were to be found. But at the court of Henry VIII., the organization of these artistic entertainments considerably advanced. An ostentatious well-read prince, he loved festivities of an intellectual character, and under his rule the germs of the English stage lay in embryo, ready for their full development, which took place with Elizabeth. In the circle of his court there was a distinguished jester (William Sommers), a personage, who in England evidently passed direct from the court to the stage; there was a laurelled poet, Skelton, whose works Dyce has edited; there were

men and choristers belonging to the royal chapel, who played before him, and from among them came that John Heywood, who since the year 1590, had been writing his humorous interludes already mentioned. At the same time the companies of the nobles continued playing; masters and scholars from St. Paul's and other schools performed pieces; at Eton, it was usual, at the feast of St. Andrew, to act a Latin or English play; even the students at the courts of law began to produce Dramas. Nevertheless all this gave the histrionic art no fixed station as yet, and thus there were still no dramatic poets, who had devoted themselves entirely to this branch of art. Under Henry VIII., there were few learned patrons of the fine arts, church disputes distracted the clergy, the nobles had yet scarcely begun to care for the poetic art, and the taste of a Surrey and a Wyatt inclined to the lyric style of Italy. How should the drama in the hands of a Heywood or a Skelton, or the stage and acting of awkward artisans, have attracted them? From their Petrarch they had derived the highest perceptions of art; but the Drama in England was hitherto a rough child of nature without grace, and, as it would seem, without capability of improvement. What should these men who held revived antiquity and ancient mythology as indispensable to poetry, what should they find in the insipid Mysteries, what should they care for the old-fashioned Moralities, when they read Boccaccio's and Bandello's tales, and Poggio's Facetiæ?

But the *revival of ancient art* soon had its influence over English poetry. We have already mentioned how the lyric, allegoric, and pastoral poetry of Italy was here largely diffused; upon the drama also this state of things could not

fail to have its effect. The dramatic examples of old, and the French and Italian imitations, were known in England, and this fact was indisputably highly important, pointing out as it did to the dramatic art-movement of the age, which was roused by its own power and instinct, the direct path to the end. As early as 1520, under Henry VIII., a piece of Plautus was represented. Under Elizabeth's rule, pieces by Terence and Euripides appeared among the dramas performed; the "Phenician women" of the latter was translated by Gascoigne in 1566 under the title of *Jocasta*, the same person, who was then conducting the representations of the "Supposes" from Ariosto at Gray's Inn; about ten years later the "History of error" was performed before Elizabeth, probably an elaboration of the *Menœchmi* of Plautus. Before the *Jocasta*, there had appeared translations and partly elaborations of Seneca's collected tragedies. The first pieces (*Troades*, *Thyestes* and the furious *Hercules*) were revised and here and there amplified from 1559 to 1561 by Jasper Heywood, the son of John; so likewise the pieces which the learned Studley undertook, — *Medea*, *Agamemnon*, *Hippolyt* and *Hercules*; the rest were translated by Alex. Nevyle, Nuce, and Newton; the whole collection, completed as early as 1566, was printed in 1581, shortly before the poetic school, previous to and contemporary with Shakespeare, began to emulate its tragic attempts, and has indisputably exercised an influence too lightly esteemed. Among the tragedies which were played before Elizabeth after the appearance of these of Seneca from 1568 to 1580, there are eighteen upon classical and mythological subjects; proofs sufficient of the manner in which the knowledge and delight in these matters rapidly gained ground. But far

more important than by this reception of classical matters, must the introduction of the ancient drama have been by its influence upon the improvement of the dramatic form, and the artistic feeling of the poet. The history of the modern drama proves universally, that the poetic nature of nations, however productive may have been its creative power, had no longer that ripening power of gaining from the drama an enjoyable fruit, without the graft of the ancient art. As soon as these highly praised works of Plautus and Seneca were naturalized in England, it followed as a first result, that more highly intellectual minds, and persons of a more elevated condition, became interested in dramatic poetry: this alone must draw the drama from its rough elements into regular treatment and form. This effect was shown almost immediately in tragedy and comedy. At the time when the translations of Seneca were completed, the English possessed already three farces: Ralph Roister Doister (certainly as early as between 1530—40) whose subject is the wooing of a gallant for the love of a betrothed lady and his unceremonious rejection; Jack Juggler (1563), in which the personage of this name endeavours to persuade the hero of the piece, that he is not himself, but some one else; and Gammer Gurton's needle (1566), where the story turns upon a lost needle, whose disappearance gives the rogue Diccon an occasion for a course of mischief. All three pieces have thrown off the influence of the earlier styles, the absence of all action and grouping as in the interludes of Heywood, and the unnaturalness of the Moralities, the last of them even all moralizing tendency; all three refer to Terence and Plautus, and are suggested by the Latin comedies. Viewed in comparison with Heywood's interludes,

the most extraordinary progress is to be perceived, which the contemplation of those ancient models alone made possible; the gap between them and Heywood's pieces is the same, as that in Germany between Frischlin's Latin plays in the spirit of Terence and Hans Sachs, natural dramas. The authors of the first and third of the pieces mentioned are known; Nicholas Udall, the writer of the first, was a learned antiquarian, a master at Eton and author of other pieces; John Still, the author of the last, was a Master of Arts, Archdeacon of Sudbury and subsequently Bishop of Bath. By their side, also a few years after Elizabeth ascended the throne, arose the first English tragedy, which was suggested by Seneca. The famous *Ferrex and Porrex* (or *Gorboduc*) was first represented in 1561. The piece was composed by one of those patrons of knowledge, one of those Sonnetteers among the nobility, Thomas Sackville (Lord Buckhurst and Earl of Dorset), in conjunction with his poetic friend Thomas Norton. It formed an epoch in the history of the English stage, scarcely so much from its regularity of style and structure, nor from the introduction of iambic verse, as that a man belonging to the upper classes of society should engage in this kind of poetry. From this time forth, the attention of those Sidneys and of all those Mæcenas' among the nobility, whom we have before known as the fosterers of the courtly and learned Italian style, was also fixed upon this branch of art; regular pieces were produced in greater numbers and performed before the art-loving queen. During the thirty years which elapse between her ascension to the throne and Shakespeare's appearance in London, we possess the names of a series of 51 pieces, now for the most part lost, which were

performed before her. From the mere titles of these we may guess, that the regular drama gained more and more ground, and by degrees attained to that point, upon which we shall find it at the time that Shakespeare undertook its further improvement.

However decidedly the ancient drama had, from the middle of the 16th century, begun to form and fashion the formless drama of England, its influence could not extend so far, as to annul the habits of four centuries, to erect a learned courtly stage in the place of the popular theatre, to set aside the national subjects and figures, to introduce the antique with chorus and chorus-singers instead of the free unshackled form, and to impose the constraint of the so-called unities of time and place. In the above-named farces, which were meant as imitations of the Latin comedies, there is nothing of the urbanity of Terence; they are thoroughly kept up in the unconstrained tone of the happy humour of the Saxon people. The tragedy of Porrex and Ferrex places indeed, as in the ancient tragedy, the action behind the scene, and concludes every act with a chorus; still from the allegorical pantomimes, which precede the acts, and from an excessively sententious mannerism, it is too visibly allied to the Moralities; there is no idea of an attention to the Unities. We mentioned before, that until about 1580, eighteen represented pieces are recorded, whose matter is borrowed from old myths or histories; but what is preserved to us of this kind, allows us to perceive, how little here the ancient spirit had a place in the conception of the subject, or the ancient form in the dramatic treatment. We will not refer to a composition so crude as Preston's *Cambyzes*, in whose "vein" the noble Falstaff

enacts king Henry; but even the most educated gentlemen and scholars who were most conversant with dramatic poetry and belonged to the royal stage, though studying the ancients, exhibited little of the ancient style.

Of Richard Edwards, who was esteemed by his contemporaries as a phoenix of the age, we have a "tragic comedy" of Damon and Pythias, which was intended to have been written according to the rules of Horace. In the relation, in which the poet has placed the philosophers Aristipp and Carisophus to the court of Dionysius, we are reminded somewhat of the parasites of the Latin comedies; but the really serious parts are so stiff, that they remind not of the classic school; in the burlesque scenes inserted, the figure of a favourite of the popular English stage is introduced, Grim, the collier of Croydon, and they turn upon amusements of the lowest taste, upon cudgelings and wine-drinkings, shaving and pick-pocketing. From 1580, before the group of tragic poets around the young Shakespeare, cast him into the shade, John Lily (born about 1553) ruled the court-stage, where in a series of dramas of unequal value (*Dramatic works*. ed. Fairholt. 1858), he laid the foundation of a more refined comedy, which was performed by the children of the Chapel Royal. In his pieces, the antique lies most characteristically side by side with English manners and matters in an utterly disunited combination. Among them, *Mother Bombie* is, according to matter, a pure popular farce, but at the same time it is designed in the purest style of Terence. The pastoral play *Galatea* is a greek legend transported to Lincolnshire, and acted by classically named shepherds, by the side of whom stand caricatures of the most modern style, alchemists and astro-

logers. In *Endymion* an accurate imitation of Plautus' bully appears in a mythological material, which in the fashionable Italian manner of conceits is manufactured into a flattering glorification of the queen. In *Midas*, the fables of this Phrygian king are dramatized, in it however the English spectators at once saw a satire upon Philip II., the lord of the American Eldorados. In *Alexander and Campaspe*, all the witty anecdotes and sallies which antiquity heaped upon Alexander and Diogenes, are put together as in a mosaic, but with a perfectly modern ease, lightness, and perspicuity of language, from which Shakespeare learned most directly the prose of his comic scenes. In all these pieces there remains scarcely a touch of antique nature, of the æsthetic sense of form, of the arranging and sifting spirit of the ancient dramatists. Thus George Whetstone also, the author of *Promos and Cassandra* (1578), (the foundation of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*), announces himself as a scholar of the antique, complains of the improbabilities, upon which the English dramas are founded, and of the rough manner in which they are executed; but his proceeding in the stiff ten-act piece places him also among the many, who at that time saw and commended the better course, and followed the bad. Even the art of much more genuine scholars of antiquity could not break the nature of a people, nor restrain and divert the poetical remembrances and traditions of the romantic middle ages! After those noble poets, and their adherents, had remodelled lyric and epic poetry in the spirit of the classic restoration in Italy, it was in the highest degree probable that they would make the attempt to refine also the rough popular drama according to the higher conceptions of the ancients. Philip Sidney had,

in his "Apology of Poetry" (1587), energetically appealed to the precepts and examples of ancient art; with Euripides as his model he insisted upon the representation of catastrophes, and ridiculed the romantic pieces, which begin an action *ab ovo*. Samuel Daniel, whom we have already mentioned as a sonnetist, rested on this honoured authority, and, disgusted by the vain contrivances and coarse follies of the stage, he wrote his *Cleopatra* in 1594, and subsequently his *Philotas*, completely in imitation of the Greek tragedy, and in strict observation of the unities; Brandon followed him in *Octavia* in 1598; Lady Pembroke had preceded him in 1590 with a translation of *Antonius* by Garnier; and in 1594 the *Cornelia* of this Frenchman, translated by Kyd, appeared in print. But all these works of a courtly or aristocratic art fell like lost drops in the stream of the popular plays, and perished more decidedly, than with us the similar attempts of Stolberg and Schlegel. Who that has seen this pompous declamatory piece of Garnier's, and has compared it with the fresh life of an English original even of the roughest kind, who that would at all weigh the development of the French stage in comparison with the English, would have wished that these poems should have had a greater influence? poems which might have diverted the taste of the age from the past, with its thousand years of poetical traditions, from the present with its mighty capabilities, introducing formal, perhaps faultless works of art, but which would have remained a dead exercise of style.

Thus as revived art in Italy was not satisfied with imitating old forms, but incited also Petrarch and Ariosto to train in higher artistic fashion the spirit and subjects of the

traditions of the middle ages, so it happened also with the drama in England. The epos of the Italian poets, the romances of chivalry, the newly circulated Greek romances, the national ballads, the countless tales full of exquisite fables and legends from the middle ages, formed a matter too important, to be set aside by the restoration of the ancient drama. The abundance of this matter, the delight in its purport, the romantic spirit which had conjured forth in it a thousand beauties and still more exquisite desigus, overcame the forms of the classical models, and allowed but little room for the antique material. In the series of dramas, which were represented before Elizabeth between 1558 and 1580, we find with the eighteen pieces of old historical or mythological matter, a similar number whose subjects are drawn from the chivalric romances and novels. The Romantic dramas of this kind were in the most natural and the most severe contrast to the antique. Some among them manifest in the most simple manner a connection with the epic, and the transition from this form to the dramatic. As in *Percicles*, John Gower, out of whose epic story the matter is borrowed, is the explainer and regulator of the piece, so in Middleton's *Mayor of Quinborough* also, Raynolph Higdon performs the part of the chorus and the introducer of the play, the subject of which (*Hengist and Horsa*) is taken from his chronicles; and such an exhibiter appears in other pieces of this kind, where the action is carried on by pantomimes introduced, which require the explanation of these "presenters." Pieces of this kind pandered to the inclinations of the lower orders, who craved more profuse matter, and would see something for their shilling; most boldly they disregarded time and scene, they made the fantastic the

rule, in spite of the outrage it caused to the realistic friends of the antique, such as Ben Jonson, and no less so to those idealistic, who wished to restore the form of the old drama in its entire purity. About the close of the 16th century, after Daniel and Brandon had brought forward their entirely classical models, this style still prevailed: Shakespeare's *Pericles* most nearly represents it to the German reader. Just as this piece, hurrying from action to action, from place to place, disregards probability, or expressly derides it, so in Thomas Heywood's "*Fair Maid of the West*", a romance full of adventures is made into two dramas; and of a similar character are his "*Four Prentices of London*", Peele's "*Old wives' Tale*", Rowley's "*birth of Merlin*", "*the Thracian wonder*", alleged to be by Webster and Rowley, and the like. The copious change of facts and scene, the simple treatment and plot, the romantic subject and fabulous spirit of these pieces, made them dear to the people, and Thomas Heywood, when his "*Prentices*" was printed in 1615, says expressly, that at the time of its origin, this style was customary, which the more cultivated taste of later years had abandoned. This accords perfectly with what Gosson asserts in his work, "*plays confuted in fife acts*" (printed about 1580) of the sources and nature of such plays, taken from tales of knights-errant. He has seen, he tells us, that "*the Palace of Pleasure, the Golden Ass, the Æthiopian History, Amadis of France, and the Round Table*", have been ransacked, to furnish the play-houses of London. The pieces grounded on these romances, he thus characterizes: "Sometimes you shall see nothing but the adventures of an amorous knight, passing from country to country for the love of his lady, encountering many a terrible monster, made of brown paper, and

at his return is so wonderfully changed, that he cannot be known but by some posy in his tablet, or by a broken ring, or a handkerchief, or a piece of cockleshell." Very similarly Sidney in his "Apology of Poetry" depicts the bold treatment of time in these romantic plays: "Ordinary it is that two young princes fall in love: after many traverses, she is got with child, delivered of a fair boy; he is lost, groweth a man, falleth in love, and is ready to get another child, and all this in two hours' space." These absurdities, he adds, the most common-place players in Italy had laid aside.

But for that very reason, the Italians have acquired no drama of importance and still less a Shakespeare. For upon the narrow field of the interest that few cultivated and distinguished people in Italy and France felt in the antique pieces, no dramatic art could take root, as in England, where it was built upon the broad foundation of the sympathy of all classes and conditions of the people, because it rested on the ground of popular education, because it made use of all elements and materials which were accessible to the people, and because it, in that expression of Shakespeare's, made the theatre a mirror, not to reflect the life of a past world, but the life of the present. The efforts for the revival of ancient art, for the recognition of the old rules of art, in opposition to the confused extravagances of the romantic drama, could not possibly have been unknown to Shakespeare. He could not indeed blind himself to the multitude of dramas around him, in which the form of the Latin comedy, the romantic extravagant element of the old Sicilian comedy, as well as the simple domestic element of the attic, had penetrated! He was certainly acquainted with the single pieces of Lily and Marston, which were directly suggested

by Terence; he certainly lived in intercourse with Ben Jonson and Beaumont, Chapman and Heywood, who followed occasionally the track of Plautus! And in his own pieces, how often are we not carried back direct to Plautus, now by the outward details and scenery, now by the play and banter of words among his wits, now by a single trait in the delineation of sharp outlines of character, such as among misers, boasters and others. He had thus read as much as another the translated pieces of Seneca and the Latin comic writers; in the poetic sea of the old myths and legends he had bathed like a man, who is best acquainted with the element. In *Titus Andronicus*, if it proceeds from Shakespeare, we shall see, how entirely he is at home in this region. In the *Comedy of Errors* he has worked at a piece of Plautus. In the *Taming of the Shrew*, the "Supposes" of Ariosto lies as a foundation, a piece written in the spirit of the Latin comedies. The works of Seneca, Shakespeare was entirely master of; in his *Cymbeline*, after the manner of this poet, he makes the presiding divinity appear, and speak in the same antique metre, in which Heywood and Studley had imitated the Latin tragedist, a passage which, for us Germans, should have been translated in Greek trimeter. It was but natural that Shakespeare should feel himself induced, to name at some time his Ideal, to denote the highest examples of dramatic art which stood before him: he had none to name but Plautus and Seneca! But were these perhaps mere outward supports? Was this admiration merely a repetition of the much talked-of fame of these poets? Was his comprehension of antiquity not darkened by looking at it through the spirit of the age? But which of his contemporaries could have apprehended a piece of the old world with such a clear eye,

as he did the roman nature in the three histories of Coriolanus, Cæsar, and Antony? We justly distinguish the excellent Chapman, who in the middle of Shakespeare's career translated Homer, and by a bold form of language and faithful adherence to the original, might be named a wonder of the age, and whom Pope should have learned from rather than blamed; but let us read Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, and ask ourselves, whether this wonderful counterfeit imitation of the Homeric heroes were possible to another man, than to one who had seized most intensely the substance and spirit of the old epic poets? whether this parody did not demand quite another intelligence in the poet, than that translation? whether that caricature did not betray far more the eye of an artist than this copy? But just the independent position towards the father of poetry, which Shakespeare assumes in this play, intimates to us, how little this man was formed to bend to any authority, example, or rule, or to reverence exclusively any style. His art was a vessel, which afforded a receptacle for all materials in all ages. To reject the fulness of the material, or to contract for the sake of an obsolete theatrical law, could never occur to him. He appropriated to himself *Pericles*, he wrote subsequently the *Winter's Tale*, a piece upon which the ridicule of a Sidney would seem to have been written, had it not been much earlier. But, while he touched these pieces, he did not forsake the old rule from ignorance, he did not once in silence pass it over. He knew well that in the dramatic treatment of an historical subject, the great theme is mutilated merely by the representation in successive scenes, but this could not induce him, on account of this impropriety, to yield the essential also of which art was capable. In his *Henry V.* in five highly poet-

ical prologues, he invites the auditors to transport themselves by the powers of the imagination over these mis-treatments of time and scene; and this is the bold manifesto against that rule, which behoved a poet like Shakespeare. So also has Marston in a preface to his "Wonder of Women", (1606) with hearty good-will given a blow to the defender of the antique rule, whilst he declares his will not to be constrained within the narrow limits of an historian, but to enlarge like a poet. If the Winter's Tale, through the connection of the history of two generations, is a tale, as its title intimates, why should not a tale be brought upon the stage? In the prologue to the second part (4th Act) Shakespeare makes Time speak in dark generalities, that which he himself, in the name of his creative art, significantly enough would say respecting the peculiarity of the stage-law of unity of time, which he purposely rejects:

Impute it not a crime,
 To me, or my swift passage; that I slide
 O'er sixteen years, and leave the growth untried
 Of that wide pass; since it is in my power
 To o'erthrow law and in one self-born hour
 To plant and o'erwhelm custom. Let me pass
 The same I am, ere ancient'st order was,
 Or what is now received: I witness to
 The times that brought them in; so shall I do
 To the freshest things now reigning: and make stale
 The glistening of the present, as my tale
 Now seems to it.

More significantly the form of an unmeaning law, which is linked to the humour of the taste of the age, could not be rejected. The task was now, that in the stead of this rejected outward law, an inner lasting one should be placed. How Shakespeare did this, our discussions in the course of this work will educe. And at its conclusion, we shall find the remark

which Schiller made, completely justified, that Shakespeare's new art is perfectly consistent with the true old law of Aristotle; and more: that out of it a yet more spiritual law can be deduced than that of Aristotle; and a law that was created for the moulding of a far richer material than belonged to the ancient tragedy, which thus necessarily arose out of the very nature of the modern drama.

To retain the epic character of the popular drama, but to take from it its deformity, and to allow the ancient models to effect a refinement of the form, this was the instinctive tendency and work of the more accomplished poets, who from 1560 till Shakespeare's time began to dedicate art to the English drama. In this work of union the superiority of nature over art, which is throughout the characteristic of the northern poetic character, became at once apparent. This *new-birth of the English art-drama* manifests itself in a homogeneous group of tragedies, which through a more concise action and a more distinct form are in direct opposition to those vague epic-romantic plays. The plays which we mean are all severe tragedies mostly of a bloody character; they are almost all grouped round Marlowe's "Tamburlaine" but they are called forth by the remote influence of that first English art-tragedy, the *Ferrex and Porrex* of Lord Sackville, just as much as that was by Seneca. Those of this group which lie before "Tamburlaine" and are more independent of its influence, approach nearer the classic form; thus the tragedy *Tancred and Gismunda*, which Robert Wilmot composed with four other pupils of the Temple and represented in 1568; thus the *Misfortunes of Arthur*, by Thomas Hughes, which was performed in Greenwich in 1587, at which the famous Bacon took a part. These pieces,

like Ferrex and Porrex, shift the action behind the scene and are essentially dialogue and relation, tangibly and avowedly ruled by the influence of Seneca. In this is Marlowe's "Tamburlaine" more independent, which appeared in 1586, just as Shakespeare came to London, who thus freshly encountered the immense effects which this piece made upon the stage, and the revolution which it occasioned in dramatic poetry. This piece transplanted to the national stage, if not for the first time, yet with the greatest energy, the iambic blank verse, which grants the actor the pathos to which he was accustomed from the declamation of the older fourteen-syllabled rhymes, but admitted of more nature and motion. The heroic purport of this great double tragedy was announced with solemnity; the high style of this stately action was equalled by the majestic style of the delivery; the people were to be satiated with a series of battle-pieces; the rhetorical sublimity was to content the more refined guests. The piece fell upon a favourable soil. Just in the same year 1586, London saw the great tragedy of the cruel execution of Babington and his fellow-conspirators, in the following year fell the head of Mary Stuart, in the next happened the destruction of the Spanish Armada; such tragedies in actual life have ever accompanied the tragedy of the stage, where it has received a greater and more enduring nurture. During these years therefore, tragedies in Marlowe's style arose in numbers. The Spanish tragedy of Kyd (1588) and Jeronimo, which was added to it by another poet as a first part, shared the fame and the popularity of "Tamburlaine", nay surpassed it; Peele's Battle of Alcazar, Greene's Alphonso and Orlando Furioso, Lodge's Marius and Sylla, Nash's Dido, at which Marlowe himself worked, Locrine, which is often regarded

as a work of Shakespeare, and *Titus Andronicus*, which stands among Shakespeare's writings, are all pieces, which appeared within a few years after "*Tamburlaine*", and collectively betray a decided affinity of spirit, both as to form and subject. In every respect these pieces stand on the same level with our Silesian dramas by Gryphius and Lohenstein. They are similarly written in that exaggerated pathos and in that grandiloquent rhetorically pompous style, which is characteristic of the beginner who aspires after mere effect. Unlimited passions are set in motion, and their expression is everywhere carried to exaggeration. Noisy actions and bloody atrocities shake the strong nerves of the spectator; forcible characters are distorted in caricature; in *Tamburlaine* the struggling tyrants act and treat each other like wild beasts, and even that which in Marlowe's intention was to ennoble the principal hero, (and by contrast forms the main effect of the drama,) that when satiated with blood he is gentle and peaceable, that the conqueror of the world reverences beauty and is conquered by love, even this issues from the animal nature of men. The matter of all these pieces is upon nearer consideration much more homogeneous than one would think. It turns upon that which also in the antique Drama was ever the ready theme, the first and most simple idea of tragedy, the experience namely that blood demands blood, according to the saying of Æschylus: "for murder, murder,— and for deeds, retaliation". The thought of revenge and retaliation is therefore the absorbing one of almost all these pieces. It is so even in *Ferrex and Porrex*, where brother kills brother, and in revenge the mother stabs the murderous son, in consequence of which the nobles of the land exterminate the whole bloody house. In Hughes' *Arthur*, the

house of this king, for the sin of incest, meets with the punishment of fate in the mutual death of father and son. In "Tamburlaine" this trait appears less, only that the piece concludes with the dark stroke of destiny, which fatally meets Tamburlaine, when he would burn the temple of Mahomed. The catastrophe in *Lochrine* turns upon the vengeance of the repudiated Guendeline towards *Lochrine* and the Scythian queen *Estrilde*. The Spanish tragedy and *Jeronimo* are intrinsically revenge-pieces; in the former, the spirit of the murdered *Andrea* appears with vengeance as the chorus in the beginning of the piece; the murderer of this *Andrea* is *Balthasar*, who has drawn upon himself the vengeance of the surviving betrothed of *Andrea*, and through the murder of her second lover *Horatio* excites besides the vengeance of his father *Jeronimo*; the spirit of *Horatio* stimulates the father to the dangerous work of revenge, more surely to accomplish which, *Jeronimo* feigns himself mad, until he at last in a play which he performs with *Balthasar* and his accomplice, attains his end. From these hasty glimpses we see, that this piece had an influence upon the plan of *Hamlet*, and still more closely upon *Titus Andronicus* and the feigned madness of the avenger *Titus*. This piece also is fully imbued with the idea of vengeance. And this theme especially, the concealment of vengeance or of crime behind dissembled madness or depression, appears to have much occupied the dramatic taste of the day; it is brought into play even in a less tragic piece by Webster and Marston, the *Malcontent* (1604), in Ford's "Broken heart", and in Webster's *Vittoria Corombona* (1612). The horrors of vengeance, however, which those Spanish tragedies and *Titus Andronicus* multiply, are by no means the worst.

Chettle's "Hoffinann or Vengeance for a father" (1598) exceeds these by far, and in Marlowe's *Maltese Jew* (1589—90) there is in the hero Barabas, as it were, the whole hereditary hatred of the Jews compressed into one individual, and the poet invents all imaginable deeds of vengeance, with which the abominably mal-treated Jew vents his smothered rage upon the christian race.

We cite alone this one group of bloody tragedies, to characterize the state of things at the time of Shakespeare's arrival in London. A wild, rival activity of rough talents and of rough characters surged around him. The inharmonious, the unformed nature of these works reflected the nature of the age and the authors in a faithful daguerreotype. They are the products of a chaotic world of mind, which the whole circumstances of the public life in town and court made yet more confused, where in an unadjusted struggle, splendour and vulgarity, true love of art and coarse feeling, actual desire after a higher intellectual existence and the utmost licentiousness of habit, strive together. The excess of passion in the characters of those pieces is only a copy of that which the life of these poets themselves partly exhibited; the overstraining in the sentiments and modes of action of their heroes is only an imitation of the overstraining of the imagination and of the talent of the poets themselves; the morbid and spasmodic tendencies, the constrained violence and force of the actions, speeches, and men, which they produce, is only the copy of the storm and impulse in the life of these titan natures, who jolted against the proprieties of life and its limits, with something of the same lack of nature and the same coarseness, as the youthful associates and poetic friends who gathered round the

young Goethe and Schiller. It is a strange occurrence that Marlowe in his dramas attempted the subject of Faust, which many of Goethe's friends thought of, and into which Goethe himself compressed the whole substance of the titanic period of his youth. If Shakespeare really wrote Titus Andronicus, he devoted himself at first entirely to the ruling school; his Pericles may represent the style of the epic-romantic dramas, his Henry VI. that of the histories, and his Titus that of the tragedies just alluded to. But whatever great or small share he may have had in these pieces, he concludes with them this period and commences a new one, which must and can alone bear his name, because no other work even of a later age belongs to it, save his own. Such a cleft separates this poet from his successors and predecessors both with regard to æsthetics and ethics. The wild nature and the untutored feelings of those Marlowe friends and pupils, touched no chord within, even if in the early exuberance of youth, the life and actions of his companions had infected him. If he wrote his Adonis and Lucrece while yet in Stratford, how mildly and tenderly, how utterly removed from the bloody delight of those tragedies, has he treated the mournful circumstances in these poems! In his first independent tragedy, in Richard III., that thought of avenging retribution is indeed predominant, but in what a different, magnificent conception and execution! In Romeo and Juliet, how the tragic idea is at once introduced in its greatest depth, so that it would appear inconceivable, had not an excellent previous work pointed out the path. In Hamlet above all, that thought of revenge, which so much occupied the poets of Shakespeare's time, is made the very theme of the tragedy, but in what a

mild light of human morality does the solving of this theme place the poet compared to those rude and abandoned minds! He who knows the relation in which Goethe's Tasso stands to the similar inventions of his unbridled youthful friends, will at once recognize the similar relation of Hamlet to the Spanish tragedy and the like; he will feel that in Shakespeare a softer spirit dwelt, even if in a discordant mood he had written that Titus Andronicus; he will perceive that this poet, like Goethe, separated himself early and resolutely from the tendency of art and morals of his early poetic associates. Early, therefore, he began in his works to deride this mode of poetry, to ridicule the Spanish tragedy in parodizing quotations, and to place in the lips of the swaggering Pistol where this style ridicules itself, the bombast of "Tamburlaine" and the battle of Alcazar. But more than by these parodies of single passages, the early withdrawal of Shakespeare from those works of subordinate minds and talents is exhibited by the nature of the first acknowledged dramas from his own hand. These were comedies and not bloody tragedies; they were comedies of a more refined style, comedies of which England previously had scarcely found a trace. Among the many pieces of Shakespeare's early efforts, there is no work, which shows a similar refinement, as the first of these independent creations, *Love's Labour's Lost* and the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*.

Not quite so great as in tragedy and comedy, is the cleft which separates Shakespeare from his predecessors in history; here the transition is more gentle, because the same comparatively rich sources of Holinshed and other chronicles were equally at the command of the poets, because

the prepared material, borrowed from history and held in patriotic reverence, did not admit of the extravagances, to which the dramatists abandoned themselves in their freer subjects, and because the sober reality here confined them to one element, which healthfully counteracted their unrestrained nature. The group of historical dramas from English history, which arose shortly before and at the same time as Shakespeare's Histories, consists for that reason of indeed less attractive and imaginative works, but still of the most creditable, which the English stage at that time produced, and which also indisputably must have exercised the most beneficial effect upon the public mind. That these pieces stand nearer to Shakespeare than all others, proceeds doubtless from the relation, in which these pieces have often stood to Shakespeare's own poetry, or on account of which they were composed. His Henry VI. is only an appropriation of the works of foreign poets; to the first part Shakespeare has added but little, the two last parts are merely remodellings of two preserved plays, which indeed by many critics (especially German) are regarded as first sketches by Shakespeare himself, but which proceed undoubtedly from the pen of one of his most qualified predecessors, Robert Greene, as Collier is inclined to assume, or Marlowe, to whom Dyce awards them. Shakespeare's plays upon Henry IV. and V. sprang from an older but very coarse historical drama, which was represented before 1588. There is also a Latin Richard III. (before 1583) and an English "true tragedy of Richard III." (about 1588), also insignificant works, the latter of which Shakespeare undoubtedly knew, though scarcely in one line has he used it. King John, on the contrary, rests upon a better piece, printed

as early as 1591, which offered much available matter for retaining and therefore has been often regarded as an earlier work of Shakespeare's. Thus Tieck and Schlegel have erroneously declared some historical plays of the burgher class, Cromwell and John Oldcastle, Tieck even the "London Prodigal" and an Edward III., (about 1595) to be Shakespeare's works. This latter piece makes use of single touches from the Shakespeare dramas, and is embellished with many a skilful ornament of choice construction and rare images; yet it has nothing of Shakespeare's deeper power of invention and delineation of character; whoever remembers his treatment of the popular favorite Percy, and those few verses in which he makes Edward III. look down smiling upon his lionhearted son from the height in the heat of battle, will not believe that the same poet should have depicted such a faintly drawn Black Prince as that in Edward III. Notwithstanding the piece is the work of a finer hand. And indeed the highest talents emulated each other in this style of writing, which in the last ten years of the 16th century appeared to be the predominant. Of George Peele, we have indeed in the period prior to 1590, Edward I., a piece, which begins promisingly, but ends without form and in extravagant redundancy of matter. By Marlowe there is an Edward II. (1593), which freer from bombast and more arranged in matter and language than the rest of his works might have furnished Shakespeare with a direct model; with regard, indeed, to the exact composition, there are, it is true, in the history of the weak Edward II., surrounded with favourites and rebels, the characters and situations of Richard II. and Henry IV., but nothing is made of it but a chronicle in scenes, which

possesses not even the sharply drawn characters and the passionate agitation of Henry VI. Nay even there is nothing in this piece of the natural freshness, of the popular scenes among the welsh rebels in Peele's Edward I. And scenes like these are by far the most refreshing part of history, because they present the freest scope and usually the most attractive characters. They stand in the same proportion to the serious parts of history, as the ballad to the chronicle. The heroes too of these episodical passages, less fettered by historical material, Robin Hood and such like, have not seldom been the heroes of ballads; and personages like the magician Faust, Peter Fabel, Brother Rausch, and Bacon, the Collier Grim, and others, had been already popular favorites in living tradition, long before they came upon the stage. Robin Hood was brought upon the stage by Munday in two pieces (the Earl of Huntingdon) at the close of the 16th century, also the "magic contest of John a Kent and John a Cumber", in imitation of Robert Greene's "Bacon and Bungay". By the latter is perhaps also the "Pinner of Wakefield" (about 1590), in which the robber-hero George Greene is brought into collision with a second herculean fighter of this sort: in such pieces the ballad with its bold touches treads upon the stage, merely put into dialogue, just as the chronicle does in the simple historical plays. The hardy popular nature bursts forth here through all bombastic pathos and Italian conceits; it is so faithfully and directly transcribed, as with us in the rustic poetry and merry tales of the time of the Reformation; the scenes in the woods and country of these pieces breathe freshness and natural life. More refined and more polished than this "Pinner" is the "merry devil" of Edmonton (first printed in

1608), which by some is imputed to Drayton, by others to Shakespeare; but in this piece, in the poaching scenes and comic personages contained in it, we may rather trace Shakespeare's influence. Thus is it also in Thomas Heywood's *Edward IV.* (about 1600), in the first part of which the old ballad of the Tanner of Tamworth has received excellent treatment full of freshness and natural humour. In all these ballad-pieces there is a touch of the free movement and the powerfully described characters of the Shakespeare poetry; there is none of the monotonous diction of the common histories and tragedies; all moralizing and rhetoric is abolished; the poets throw themselves entirely into the condition of the matter; the scholar and the writer is overcome, the poet has forgotten himself, he has vanished in the actors and the action; here began Shakespeare's art to prove itself wholly independent and new. And as we intimated before, it is in these histories and ballad-pieces alone, that his poetry appears entwined in a closer manner with that of his contemporaries; in all others it presents itself rather as a transplanted nursling, upon which a far nobler fruit has been grafted.

We will add only a few words upon the externals of the style, and the history of the diction and versification of the English drama. The old Mysteries were for the greater part written in rhyming couplets, which consist of short verses in alternating rhymes; the Moralities were mostly composed in short verses with coupled rhymes. In the more finished plays of Skelton longer rhymes of 10 to 15 syllables appear; these lengthened verses prevail also with Edwards, Udall, and Still; they are employed by the translators of Seneca. They have been called Alexandrines, though they

were meant to imitate the ancient trimeter. The learned authors of Ferrex and Porrex first introduced the rhymeless iambics of five feet, which subsequently became the standing metre of the modern drama. Still at that time the fashion did not prevail; they found this short blank verse more agreeable to the ear, but they liked not yet to miss the rhyme. This is notoriously often to be met with here and there in Shakespeare's works also, and especially throughout his earlier pieces. The histories, with their bald and insipid material, helped especially to banish the jingle of rhyme from the stage. Before the group of the tragedians around Marlowe since 1586 appeared, Gascoigne, in the translation of the "Supposes" of Ariosto, had given the example of the use of prose, and John Lily introduced it in his comedies and pastorals. He had written a work in 1579 entitled "Euphues, anatomy of wit", in which English taste, as it appears, was offended by the application of the extravagant Italian conceits to a non-poetical subject, which it submitted to in the Italian style of poetry. This style, an accumulation of constrained witticisms and similes, became for a time the fashionable strain of conversation; we find it employed in petitions to the queen and magistrates as in poetry; all ladies, it was said, had become Lily's scholars in this mode of speech, and at the court no one was esteemed, who could not converse in the fashion of Lily's "Euphuism". Drayton characterizes this style as if its main attribute had been the images which it derives from stars, stones, plants, that is, from a fabulous natural philosophy; a similar passage from the "Euphues" has Shakespeare ridiculed in the comparison of the camomile, which he places in the lips of Falstaff in his royal speech. Still the general

character of Lily's prose in his dramas, consists only in a superabundance of poetic and witty language, in far-fetched similes and curious images on every occasion however unsuitable; at the same time, his prose acquires, like that of all other conceit-writers, by the continual opposition and epigrammatic turn of thought, somewhat of a sharpness, piquancy, and logical perspicuity, the worth of which as regards the development of the language, was acknowledged with praise by contemporaries such as Webster. From no other of his predecessors has Shakespeare, therefore, especially for the dexterous play of words in the merry parts of his comedies and dramas, learned and obtained so much, as from Lily. The witty conversation, the comic demonstrations, the abundance of similes and startling repartee are here prefigured; from his *quibs*, which Lily himself defines as the short expressions of a sharp wit, with a bitter sense in a sweet word, Shakespeare could form a school. But he acted here, as with Marlowe's pathos; he moderated the practice, and used the pattern in its perfect resemblance only for characteristic aims, or for ridicule. In Falstaff's and Henry's intercourse, in the comic affrays of these "most comparative" wits, Shakespeare has given free course to this vein, as Lily did without distinction on every occasion. Thus Shakespeare knew how to obtain everywhere a noble metal for his work; the dross he left behind. Similar is his connection with the outward form of the tragedies of the Marlowe school. Marlowe had introduced blank iambics upon the stage with great pomp and energy in his "Tamburlaine", so that at first a general uproar of envy and ridicule was raised against these "drumming decasyllabons", and the importance attached to their introduction. Notwithstand-

ing this metre triumphed so immediately and decidedly, that not alone for the stage in England, but for that in Germany, it remained a law. At first it was formed with the most pedantic severity and rigour, the verse concluded with the sense, and the sentence with the verse which had always an iambic close. Thus is *Titus Andronicus* written. But Shakespeare soon stepped forth from this constraint in a manner, hardly indicated by Marlowe; he intertwined the sense more freely through the verses according to the degree of passion expressed; and yielding to this inward impulse, he removed the monotonousness of the older blank verse by manifold interruption of its regular course, by abbreviation into verses of one — two — three feet, by repeated cesures and pauses, by the conclusion of these cesures with amphibrachs, by exchanging the iambic metre with the trochaic, by the alternate contraction or extension of many-syllabled words, and by combinations of words and syllables, capable of different scanning. Especially schooled by Spenser's melodious versification, he thus blended its manner with Marlowe's power, and with exquisite tact of hearing and feeling, he broke up the stiff severity of the old verse into a freedom which was foreign to his predecessors, and then in this freedom he retained a moderation, which again is partly lost by his successors.* His poetic diction moved with respect to the metrical in the same medium between constraint

* We refer any one who wishes to inform himself more accurately respecting this technical side of Shakespeare's poetry, to the unfinished work of Sidney Walker, "Shakespeare's versification". Lond. 1854. and to the acute treatise of Tycho Mommsen in his edition of *Romeo and Juliet*. Oldenb. 1859. p. 109 *et seq.*

and scope, as with respect to expression, metaphor, and poetical language it held a medium between the overloading of the Italian conceits, and the unimaginative style of the German dramas, which is often even with Goethe and Schiller only versified prose.

It is singular, that the most important of the young poets around Shakespeare all died early, and soon after Shakespeare began his dramatic career, (Peele before 1599, Marlowe 1593, Greene 1592,) as if to leave for him a broad and open path. But had they even lived, he would nevertheless be as unique as he is now. Collier thinks, Marlowe would in this case have become a formidable rival to Shakespeare's genius. We are thoroughly convinced just as little as Klinger with respect to our own Goethe. Indeed I am even of opinion, that if Greene is the original composer of the two last parts of Henry VI., certainly if he is the author of "the Pinner of Wakefield", Marlowe's austere mind and constrained talent would have not even reached to the more versatile, unambiguous, manysided nature of this man. Shakespeare had not the advantage of Goethe in having a Lessing before him, who with critical mind and well studied models had broken up a path for dramatic poetry. Unless some lost pieces of greater value, if even only one, had kindled a light for him, (as we have indeed one hint at least, that he had such an excellent dramatic model for Romeo and Juliet,) all the rest that we meet with of dramatic art in England before Shakespeare, is only like a mute way-mark to an unknown end, through a path full of luxuriant underwood and romantic wildness, which gives a presentiment of the beauty of nature, but never its enjoyment. He who laid open the way and led to a final aim of

perfect satisfaction, was Shakespeare alone. Every single genius around him he has surpassed beyond all comparison; the single qualities which this one or that fostered with partiality, he united in moderation and harmony; in the chaotic mass of dramatic productions, he first struck the electric spark, which was capable of combining the elements. From all the poetic contemporaries around him he could learn, not what to do, but what not to do. And this, after his first attempts in which he followed his models of that school, must he quickly have felt and conceived, as in his first independent works he early adopted an untrodden path, and forthwith gained a height hitherto unattained; the best piece of his poetic rivals is not to be compared with the least of his early attempts. A man like Chapman, who amid all Shakespeare's poetic contemporaries indisputably in single instances approaches nearest to Shakespeare, has somewhere expressed, that *fortune* seemed to govern the stage, and that nobody knew the hidden causes of the strange effects, that rise from this hell, or descend from this heaven. Nothing is perhaps more expressive than this sentence, to characterize the dramatic poetry of the day, and to distinguish Shakespeare's from it; the poets all convey the impression that they grope in search of an unknown aim, by which they may secure popularity. But Shakespeare began by despising the million, and whilst he strove after the applause of the few experienced, he raised himself to a height, which discovered to him at once a nobler law of art and a higher moral aim. Thus it had been a general custom among those poets, that two, three, or even five, worked together at one piece; it is the most speaking testimony that all perception of capacity for true works of art was wanting. Shake-

speare worked upon ideas, which arose from a thoughtful mind and a deep experience of life, and he could not, therefore, use the hand of a mechanical assistant. In this also he appears unique and perfectly distinct. But if demur and doubt should be raised at the opinion which separates Shakespeare so widely from his predecessors, and which exhibits him as towering so mightily above them like a giant tree above the brush-wood of the soil, it is only necessary as evidence that we have dealt fairly with the matter, to glance at his successors. That his predecessors were left behind him, where all had first to level the untrodden path, would be in no degree remarkable; but that later contemporaries and successors, who had before them the noble example of his works, and at the time of the highest prosperity of the stage, sustained by every encouragement, that they produced among hundreds of productions not a single one, that in a higher sense even augured the existence of a model like Shakespeare; this is a fact which proves indisputably, how far this man had surpassed the range of sight of those around him. Menander's Comedy is not so far removed from the genius of Aristophanes, as the English Drama after Shakespeare from his works. The ethical and æsthetic depth of both is in each case lost, almost without leaving a trace behind. We may read through the works of Munday, of Marston and Webster, of Ford and Field, of Massinger and Heywood, of Jonson and Middleton, of Beaumont and Fletcher, an uncommon richness of power and matter is prominent in their plays, which often, overladen with three-fold actions, present an inexhaustible mine for dramatists well acquainted with psychological and theatrical matters; but throughout, the work of the artisan must be refined into

the work of the artist. We look upon a mighty industry, rapidly organized upon a great demand, full of clumsy, careless, hasty manufactures paid by the piece, formed according to the wishes of the multitude, an industry occasionally guided by a publisher such as Munday, who has himself indeed made a dozen plays in company with two or three poets. Here everything in the minds engaged, testifies of sap and vigour, of life and motion, of luxuriant creative genius, of ready ability to satisfy a glaring taste with glaring effects; but the forming hand of that master is nowhere to be perceived, who created *his* works according to the demands of the highest ideal of art. Misused freedom and power, disfigured form, distorted truth, stunted greatness, these are everywhere the characteristics of the works of these poets. In the strictest contrast to the French theatre, ridiculing all rules, void of all criticism, without any arranging mind they confound commonly a wild heap of ill-connected events of the most opposite character in an exciting confusion of buffoonery and horror, and they allow indeed an action full of abominable depravity to issue in a comedy, and a plot of a conciliating development in a tragedy; they seek sublimity in extravagance, power in excess, the tragic in the awful; they strain the horrible to insipidity, they give events the loose character of adventures, they pervert motives to whims, they turn characters into caricatures. With Ben Jonson, Shakespeare's witty and cheerful view of life has become bitter satire, his idealism, realism, his florid poetry, prose soberness, his world, charming with its manifold forms of fancy, a lumber-room full of strange requisites, his delineations of the eternal nature and habits of men, a representation of ephemeral ex-

travagances, his typical characters, whimsical humourists. On the other side, there are countless pieces of the less original of the poets of that day, full of direct reminiscences of Shakespeare in the manner of speech and jest, in outward colouring, in designs, situations, and forms of character; but whoever will attempt only a few comparisons, how Massinger exaggerated the character of Jago in his "Duke of Milan", or how he christianized Shylock in his work "A new way to pay old debts", or how Ford ('Tis a pity she's a whore) transfers the glowing colouring of the love in Romeo and Juliet to an incestuous passion between a brother and sister, whoever will compare these with Shakespeare, will quickly measure the extent of the æsthetic gap between these disciples and their master. And still wider is the distance between them in an ethical respect. In a mass of dramas which originated contemporaneously with or after Shakespeare, we are transported into an infected sphere, among the middle and lower London classes, where morals were more heathenish, says Massinger, than among the heathen, and crime, as Ben Jonson represents, more refined than in hell. The society in which we here move, thus it is said in a serious morality of this time ("Lingua" 1607) are passionate lovers, miserable fathers, extravagant sons, insatiable courtesans, shameless bawds, stupid fools, impudent parasites, lying servants, and bold sycophants. These figures and subjects were not yet hideous enough for the poets; they had recourse at the same time especially to Italian society, as it is drawn in the history and romance of the age, a world of corruption, which in more bare-faced shamelessness and obduracy delights in an impudent ostentation of more violent and stronger crimes. Not satisfied with this characteristic choice of the most re-

pulsive matter, they could not even pourtray it faithfully enough in the coarsest realistic truth without an ideal perspective. Nay, not even satisfied with this photographic image, they chose rather to hold the concave mirror before the age, that the deformity might be yet more deformed. Lingered with darkened vision upon these shadow-sides in their pieces, which can often only awake the interest of criminal procedures, concealing by silence the light-side of that luxuriant English race, their political and religious power, the greater part of these poets adhere notwithstanding firmly to the ethical vocation of their art, but like Ben Jonson they fall into a harsh and severe theory of intimidation, which misses its aim in the poet's task still more than in that of the judge. Wherever they more positively tend to a moral idea, as Heywood and Massinger do, they fall into another devious path: losing that sense of moderation, which in Shakespeare measures human actions according to the pure eternal moral law, these Romantics of the English literature point in idealistic extravagance to conventionally extolled virtues, and bring forward examples of exaggerated ideas of honour and fidelity, in the style of the Spanish drama. But still most frequent is it, that the poets in the midst of the consciousness of their vocation, to elevate morals with ennobling power out of the wilderness of art and taste, drawn down by the gravitating force of the corrupt conditions of life, suffer their hand to sink in convulsive efforts, aye, that inconsiderately they resign themselves to the current of depravity, and sketch with seductive pencil the vices of the age, dead to the sensibility of moral feeling. This internal ruin sufficiently explains why the dramatic poetry of England, rapidly as it started forth, and luxuriantly as it grew

up, just as quickly withered; why its constant adversary, puritanic religious zeal, forced it so soon to relinquish the task for which it had proved itself too weak, the task of purifying society by a moral revolution. To us it would be conceivable, that this degeneration of the stage might have been alone the sufficient ground for Shakespeare's premature withdrawal from the stage, from London, and from his poetic vocation; he could no longer recognize his own work in the wild practices of those, who believed themselves his most devoted disciples. For the intellectual extent of his historical survey of the world, the profound character of his poetic creations, his moral refinement of feeling, were to the whole race a sealed letter. All this, however, makes Shakespeare's appearance in no wise a marvel. The passionate sympathy of the people for the art of the stage, the merry life of the court, the activity of a great city, the prosperity of a youthful state, the multitude of distinguished men, of famous persons by sea and land, in the cabinet and in the field, who were concentrated in London, the ecclesiastical, the political advance on all sides, the scientific discoveries, the progress of the arts in other branches, all this worked together in raising the artist, whose fascinated eye rested upon this whole movement. So too in the history of European civilization, Shakespeare's great contemporary Francis Bacon is no exception, although at that time in England he stood as solitary as Shakespeare. For the great poet, all that belonged to theatrical instrument, means, and preparation, lay ready for his dramatic art. No great dramatist of any other nation has met with a foundation for his art of such enviable extent and strength, with such a completeness of well-prepared materials for its construction, as ancient tradition and present practice

proffered them to Shakespeare: from the Mysteries, the necessity for epic fulness of matter, from the Moralities, the ideal ethical thought, from the comic interludes the characteristic of realistic truth to nature, from the middle ages, the romantic matter of the epic-poetic and historical literature, from the present, the strong passions of a politically excited people, and of a private society deeply stirred by the religious, scientific, and industrious movements of the age. The higher ideal of art, the more refined conception of form, which in this branch of poetry was not yet existing in England, he could gather, as far as he drew not from his own mind, from antiquity, and from the more cultivated branches of poetry, in which Sidney and Spenser had laboured. But that which beyond all this worked most closely and immediately upon Shakespeare's dramatic poetry, and possessed an influence which unhappily we cannot sufficiently estimate, was the flourishing state of the histrionic art. It is certain that Shakespeare learned more from the one Richard Burbadge, than he could have done from ten Marlowes. And he who is searching for a direct support for our poet, upon which his young and yet wavering art should raise itself, needs seek no other.

We must, therefore, give a short consideration to the dramatic affairs in Shakespeare's time.

THE STAGE.

The history of the stage in London kept pace with the progress of dramatic poetry. Patronized by an amusement-loving queen and even after her death promoted in every way by the learned James, supported by an ostentatious nobility, sought after in increasing degree by a sight-loving people, the stage rose extraordinarily both in the capital

and country during the last thirty years of the 16th century. What had before been for the most part the rough inoffensive amusement of artisans for their own pleasure, what the servants of the nobles had only acted before their masters, what the members of the courts in Gray's Inn and the Temple had only played before the queen or before their fellows in a small circle, what the children of the royal chapel or the choristers of St. Pauls had attempted in histrionic art before the court, this now found its way among the mass of the people and throughout the whole extent of the land. The sacred and moral tendency of the Mysteries and Moralities gave way to an exuberance of jests and burlesques; the self-satisfied dilettante attempts at poetry were changed for a serious pursuit of art prosecuted with all the zeal of novelty; acting, before a humble talent, kept under a bushel, stepped forward into public life, and became a profession, capable of supporting its votary. A great excitement in favour of the new art, to an extent which has never again been manifested but in Spain at the time of Lope de Vega, seized the people even to the lowest orders, and at the very outset the young stage was not lacking in overweening extravagance, while it felt itself doubly secure in the favour of the court and of the whole nation. The Lord Mayor and Aldermen of London endeavoured with remarkable perseverance to put an end to, not only the mischief, but even the existence and duration of this art; the royal Privy Council on the other hand was the refuge of the players, especially of the regular companies, who gave their representations in town or country under the protection of the crown or under the name of some great noble. These noble companies often rightly or wrongly announced themselves as

royal players, and under the pretext of being obliged to prepare themselves for their play before the queen, they set up their stage in taverns (for at the time, of which we speak, there were no established theatres), into which the lowest dregs of the people streamed. Besides these, there were vagabonds and adventurers, who played without any official licence, and therefore became the object of repeated prohibitions. In Puritan England there was difficulty in keeping the Sunday, even the time of divine service, free from these profane representations; the play-houses were overcrowded, the churches empty; at the court the plays on Sunday were maintained for a long time, and it was a malicious joy to the Catholics to refer to this disorder of the newly established Protestantism, which the city-authorities named in opposition to divine service, a devil's service. At the evening assemblies of the lowest London company in the tavern-theatres, there was quarrelling and noise, pick-pocketing and immoral scenes of all sorts; upon the stage, a danger of fire; during the time of the plague, an increase of infection. Besides these gross public evils, the city-authorities were apprehensive of the publication of unchaste speeches and actions, of the corruption of youth, and of the extravagance of the poor who brought their pennies for the play. When upon the repeated decrees of the municipalities against the excesses of the stage, the royal Players complained to the Privy Council and alleged in their defence the exercise of their art for the court and their need of support, the authorities replied, that it was not necessary, that they should practise before the lowest company; that they ought to play in private houses; and with respect to their maintenance, it had never been customary to make the drama a trade! These

attacks only served to establish the infant stage more firmly. The word trade was accepted, as it were, as a challenge; a regular art was now cultivated, which sought its own temple. "Art was tongue-tied by authority" as Shakespeare says in his sonnets, but the race to the goal only proceeded with greater effort. In the year 1572 an act appeared "for the punishment of vagabonds", of those players who did not belong to one of the nobles of the kingdom. In the following year the Mayor and Aldermen of London gave a refusal to a request of the Earl of Sussex, in favour of a Dr. Holmes, for the establishment of playhouses. When in the year 1574 the servants of the Lord Chamberlain, the Earl of Leicester, at whose head stood James Burbadge, gained a patent which licensed them to play in town and kingdom for the solace and pleasure of the queen as well as for "the recreation of her loving subjects", the city burdened the licence granted to the company by an obligation to contribute half their income to the benefit of the poor. However, soon after and perhaps in consequence of this opposition, James Burbadge received, through the powerful influence of his master, permission for the erection of a theatre outside the jurisdiction of the town, but close by the city-wall, in the dissolved monastery of the Blackfriars, near the bridge of the same name; at the same time arose the "Theatre" and the "Curtain" at Shoreditch, not far distant. About 1578 there were already eight different theatres in and near the city of London, to the great sorrow of the Puritans. About the year 1600, the number of theatrical buildings, exclusively devoted to this object, had risen to eleven; under James I., they reckoned seventeen existing or restored play-houses, a number, which London at the present day, so immensely

increased as it is, falls far short of possessing. Thus the better actors passed from wandering to stationary companies, which, as Hamlet says, "both in reputation and profit, was better both ways". The art was by this means confirmed in its development and intrinsic value. Its importance and significance, the esteem of the actors, their position and influence, rose unhindered. Who should advance in opposition to the omnipotent Lord Chamberlain, the chief patron of theatrical matters? Who should thrive in opposition to the pleasure of the queen, who in 1583 for the first time took twelve royal players into her service, among them those two rare men Robert Wilson and Richard Tarlton, comic actors of the most versatile extemporizing wit, the last of whom was for the age a prodigy of comic skill. The Aldermen of London were obliged to submit, that this "lord of mirth" to whom all was permitted, who at the royal table attacked even Raleighs and Leicesters, should ridicule in a jig their "long-earde familie", who would see no fools, but among their "brethren of assize". Not even ruling princes, not the state, politics, nor religion, were spared by the actors on their stage. Since the ruin of the Armada they ridiculed the king of Spain and the Catholic religion, and on the other side, the Puritans, the sworn enemies of the drama, had to fear the scourge of satire. Not alone the theatre in Shoreditch but the choristers of St. Pauls ventured to deride the Puritans in their plays, and about 1589 two companies were on that account forbidden to act. Subsequently under James I., under whom theatrical affairs rose into still greater favour, objectionable pieces were produced in the Blackfriars' theatre, of which the members of the council, the Aldermen, and at last the foreign ambassadors complained. This custom of

attacking upon the stage, public characters, the state, law, rule, and living private individuals, originated according to Thomas Heywood's assertion with those children; the poets placed their sallies in their lips, using their youth as a shield and privilege for their invectives. Soon the insolence of these boys turned against the stage itself. About the time in which Hamlet was written, these children, favoured by the public and the writers, had risen over "Hercules and his load", that is to say over the Globe theatre, the most famous of all, and they ridiculed the adult performers, the "common stages"; it is for this that Shakespeare casts a reprehensive glance in Hamlet, upon these unfledged nestlings and their pertness, who certainly wouldt themselves grow up into "common players". But just this bold interference in the life of the great capital, pleased the people; the other theatres imitated it, and carried it further than has ever happened in a modern state since Aristophanes.

All these features collectively render it plain that the vigorous fruitful inclination towards this new art, sustained and nourished in all classes by the people itself, was sufficiently powerful to defy in daring unrestraint the opposition of the strongest prejudice, of the most powerful classes, of the clergy and the magistrates, of the church and police. All advanced in the most flourishing condition; the managers of the dramas made increasing profits; the most distinguished artists, Edward Alleyn, Richard Burbadge, even our Shakespeare, died as large landholders and wealthy people. It was in vain that the religious denounced the stage in the most forcible writings, in vain that dramatic poets themselves repented of their profane toils, and recalled back their companions from this school of abuse. From

1577—1579, when Northbrooke's treatise against "Vain Plays or Interludes" and Gosson's "School of Abuse" began the strife against the stage with all authorities of the Church Fathers and heathen writers, upon christian and stoical principles, from this time a continual controversy for and against, in poetry and prose, entwined itself through the whole period of the highest prosperity of the theatre, until the year 1633, when Prynne's *Histriomastix*, the labour of seven years, appeared, at a time when the Puritans and their anti-theatrical opinions had acquired greater force and assurance. Before this time all opposition was fruitless. The dramatic poets multiplied like their works. The diary is preserved of a certain Philip Henslowe a pawnbroker, who advanced money to many companies; from his notices we gather, that between 1591—1597, one hundred and ten different pieces were performed, by those players alone with whom he transacted business. Between 1597 and 1603 he has recorded 160 pieces, and after 1597 not less than thirty dramatic authors were in his pay; among them Thomas Heywood, who alone wrote 220 pieces or had a share in them. Of all this abundance much has been lost, as no value was placed upon the publication of the plays. The ardour of the spectator was the greater, the less he read. But even when from the printing of the works of Ben Jonson and Shakespeare the reading gained ground, and the value of the stage declined, the ardent desire and taste for the art still long remained in vigour. They now saw *and* read the works; in 1633 Prynne mentions in his before-named book, that in two years above 40,000 copies of dramas had been disposed of, as they were more in favour than sermons. The period at the close of the 16th century, when Shakespeare produced

his *Romeo*, his *Merchant of Venice*, and his *Henry IV.*, was the signal for the greater extension of dramatic poetry; now professional poets appeared in numbers who dedicated the labour of their life to the art. From this time forth, the nation became aware of that inner worth of the stage, and its fame extended far beyond the kingdom. With what self-satisfaction does Thomas Heywood in his *Apology for Actors* (1612) glory that the English tongue, the most harsh, uneven, broken, and mixed language of the world, now fashioned by the dramatic art, had grown to a most perfect language, possessing excellent works and poems, so that now many nations grow enamoured of this formerly despised tongue. Strangers from all countries carried abroad the praise of the English actors, and soon we hear of English companies who performed in Amsterdam, and even traversed the whole of Germany, where we possess in German translations pieces from the English stage, now again re-translated into English from the miserable rhymes of Ayler.

The company which Shakespeare entered, when he came to London, was at that time and afterwards, the most distinguished. They were the servants of the Lord Chamberlain, the Earl Leicester, who about the year 1589 were called the Queen's Players; in their number were the fellow-citizens of Shakespeare, who probably enticed him to join them. We have said before that James Burbadge, at the head of this company, founded the theatre in the monastery of the Blackfriars, which had formerly served as a depôt for the machinery and wardrobe of the pageants and masks of the court, and therefore naturally had attracted Burbadge's attention. The position of this stage, in the centre of London, and the enticing attraction of its performances, vied

with each other in securing to this theatre the first rank, in giving it the highest importance as well as the greatest success. The rapid good fortune of this company may be traced in the fact that about 1594 they built a second and more spacious theatre, the Globe, not far from the Southwark foot of London Bridge; it was an open space, where plays were performed in the fine time of the year. During the building of the Globe, the Lord Chamberlain's players acted, it seems, for a time, in connection with the Lord Admiral's company at Newington, so that they appear everywhere to have been sought after and engaged. The company of the Admiral's was the most powerful rival of the Blackfriars'. Both companies escaped in every occasion that the authorities raged against the theatres, because their stages were not regarded as common playhouses, but as establishments for the practice of the plays which the Queen desired. About 1597 the theatres had given another offence; the privy council itself this time commanded that the "Theatre" and "Curtain" in Shoreditch should be "plucked down", and "any other common play-houses" in Middlesex and Surrey. But all these decrees appear to have been issued by the Privy Council only for the sake of appearance, in order, as Collier says, "to satisfy the importunity of particular individuals, but there was no disposition on the part of persons in authority to carry them into execution". The Players of the Lord Admiral, who acted in the Curtain in winter, in the Rose in Summer, had given the offence in 1597, but notwithstanding they subsequently continued to perform in the Curtain, which according to decree was to have been demolished, and in the Rose, which Henslowe had converted into a theatre in 1584,

they remained just as undisturbed as the company of the Lord Chamberlain in the Globe. In 1598 both these companies were newly licensed; and about 1600, Henslowe and Alleyn, the leaders of the Admiral's Players, removed from the dilapidated Rose, to the Fortune in Golden Lane, probably to be further from the Globe; and here Edward Alleyn, the rival of Richard Burbadge, soon after purchased land, to an amount which evidences that he was an unusually wealthy man.

The stage in Blackfriars on which the two gifted friends, Shakespeare and Richard Burbadge, performed, proudly boasted of being the most refined and cultivated in London. With this superiority we must not imagine, that any outward splendour and luxury was combined. A happy simplicity prevailed throughout the exterior of the representation. The buildings were bad, and built of wood; those provided with a roof were called private theatres; the public ones were uncovered; gallery and boxes were divided as at present; for the best box only a shilling was paid. The proper periods for plays, before they became public spectacles, were in the winter, at Christmas, New Year'sday, Twelfth-day, and Lent. But after the drama had become a profession, the public theatres were open throughout the year; under Elizabeth daily. Trumpets and a flag displayed, announced the approaching commencement, which took place in the afternoon at three o'clock. Music from an upper balcony, above the now so-called stage-boxes, opened the piece; the spectators amused themselves before it began with smoking and games, eating fruit and drinking beer; rude young men thundered and fought for bitten apples: so it is said in Henry VIII. The distinguished patrons and

judges thronged the stage, or placed themselves behind the side-scenes. The speaker of the prologue who appeared after the third flourish of trumpets was generally attired in black velvet. Between the acts, buffoonery and singing was kept up, and at the end of the piece a fool's jig, with trumpets and pipes, was introduced. At the conclusion of the whole a prayer was offered up by the kneeling actors for the reigning prince. Upon costume and dress the most was expended; they appear occasionally to have been magnificent. From "the Alleyn Papers" we know that on some occasion more than £ 20. was given for a velvet cloak, and the adherents of good old customs considered it most flagrant that two hundred actors should be seen splendid in silk garments, while eight hundred poor hungred in the streets. On the other hand the scenery was extremely scanty. Trap-doors were of an early date. Moveable decorations appeared later; for tragedies the theatre was hung round with black tapestry. A raised board bore the name of the place, at which the spectator should imagine himself; it was thus easy to represent ships, easy to change the scene, and natural to disregard the unity of place. An elevation, a projection in the middle of the stage served for window, rampart, tower, balcony, for a smaller stage in the theatre, as for example, for the interlude in Hamlet. In the court representations, however, this poor makeshift was early cast aside. In 1568, there were painted scenes, houses, towns, and mountains, even storms with thunder and lightning. Moveable decorations appeared first in 1605 at Oxford, at a representation before King James, and in the following years they spread so far, that scene-shifting soon became common. A few years before Shakespeare came to London,

Sir Philip Sidney described in his "Apology of Poetry" (1583) the rough and simple condition of the popular stage, according to his noble and learned conceptions of the dramatic art, in a deriding but expressive manner. "In most pieces," he says, "you shall have Asia of the one side, and Afric of the other, and so many other under-kingdoms, that the player, when he comes in, must ever begin with telling where he is, or else the tale will not be conceived. Now you shall have three ladies walk to gather flowers, and then we must believe the stage to be a garden; by and by we hear news of a shipwreck in the same place; then, we are to blame if we accept it not for a rock. Upon the back of that comes out a hideous monster with fire and smoke, and then the miserable beholders are bound to take it for a cave; while, in the meantime, two armies fly in, represented with four swords and bucklers, and then what hard heart will not receive it for a pitched field?" Just in a similar tone Shakespeare himself, in the prologue to *Henry V.*, ridicules the "unworthy scaffold" upon which the poet dares "to bring forth so great an object", the cock-pit, which is to represent "the vasty fields of France", the little number of mute figures and expedients when "with four or five most vile and ragged foils, right ill disposed, they would disgrace, in brawl ridiculous, — the name of Agincourt."

We should draw a conclusion contrary to nature and experience, if we argued from this poverty of the outworks a rough dramatic art. In Germany we have seen in one and the same place the theatre rise from the barn to the poor play-house and then to the magnificent structure, whilst the intellectual enjoyment, interest, and taste was perhaps just in inverse proportion ever in the decline. In a

generation accustomed to art and soon corrupted by art, the fancy soon demands all the stimulants offered by magnificent decorations and accessories; the simple, still fresh, feeling of a society, to whom the least enjoyments are new and overwhelming, requires none of these enhancements and incentives. The imagination is here excited by the slightest touch. Therefore can Shakespeare in that same prologue to *Henry V.*, confidently rely upon the "imaginary puissance" of his auditors; he can demand of them to "piece out" the imperfections of the stage with their thoughts, to divide one man into a thousand parts, and to create in imagination the forces, which the stage cannot provide. The less distraction offered to the senses, the more the whole attention of the spectators was fixed upon the intellectual performances of the actors, and the more were these directed to the essence of their art. We must not forget, how much temptation from the false gratification of the senses the players and spectators were spared, how much the fixing of the mind upon the nature of the matter was facilitated by the one circumstance, that no women acted. The custom of the time was strong upon this point; when in 1629, French actors appeared in London, among whom women played, they were hissed off the stage. Dramatic *poetry* was in later times seduced by this custom to become still more bold and impudent, but for the histrionic art, it offered the most tangible advantages. How many intrigues behind the scenes, how much that was dangerous to the moral character of the actor, was removed by this one habit, which at the same time promoted, in far more deeplying results, the most refined development of the histrionic art. The female characters were to be played by boys; this

made the boys' theatres a necessity; and these became a school for actors, such as we possess not at all in later times. And what actors! From these schools proceeded Field and Underwood, who were even famous as boys; and how must these boys have been trained who could have played tolerably even for rougher natures, a Cordelia and an Imogen? And were they rough natures who at that time took an interest in the stage? a Francis Bacon, who himself once in his youth in Gray's Inn took part in a representation? and that Raleigh, that Pembroke, that Southampton, who when they were in town, regularly visited the stage? We will not attach too much importance to the fact, that the court distinguished before all others the players of the Blackfriars company, that king James as well as Elizabeth, according to Jonson's testimony, particularly delighted in Shakespeare's pieces; though the court was certainly the choicest auditory, before which a poet like Shakespeare could wish to exhibit his works! What may we not suppose of the queen's intellectual perception and versatility, if accustomed to the gross and open flatteries of Lily and Peele, she could admire the refined compliments of the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, full of enchanting poetry and allusions? But even outside the court, Shakespeare's stage had attracted the noblest company. Even of the public spectators, who sat in the boxes of Blackfriars, the Prologue to *Henry VIII.* could say, that they were known to be "the first and happiest hearers of the town." The poet, who had worked for this theatre, had formed this public; how had he otherwise so steadily, so perseveringly created his profound works, to lavish them upon coarseness? But he fashioned also his actors. Histrionic art and dramatic poetry

were here in the rarest reciprocity; never could Burbadge have become with the pieces of Marlowe and Ben Jonson, what he became with Shakespeare's; and never could the poet have preserved the profound character of his dramas, nor so often veiled with art the thoughts of his works, nor fashioned his most wonderful characters, often as if designedly, into mysterious problems, if he had not had at his side men, who followed him into the depth to which he descended, who understood how to lift his veil and to solve his enigmas.

To form an idea of the plays of the older actors, when they suffered from puritanical declamation, when they practised their tragic art in Marlowe's forcible bombast, and sought comic effect in low buffoonery, we need only remember the descriptions in Shakespeare's own pieces. From the old Miracle-plays, he mentions in Hamlet the parts of the Saracen God Termagant and the tyrant Herod, which the actors overdid in tragic fury. And his allusions to the character of Vice in the Moralities, affirm that this part was played with the most common-place buffoonery. With respect to tragic plays, he depicts in Troilus and Cressida picturesquely and expressively the pitiful extravagance of the proud hero, whose "wit lies in his sinews"; who

"Doth think it rich
To hear the wooden dialogue and sound
'Twixt his stretch'd footing and the scaffoldage";

who,

"When he speaks,
'Tis like a chime a mending; with terms unsquared,
Which, from the tongue of roaring Typhon dropp'd,
Would seem hyperboles".

These were those "robustious and periwig-pated fel-

lows", of whom Hamlet speaks, "who outdid Termagant and out-heroded Herod, who delighted in tearing" a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings (those who stood on the *ground* in old theatres); players, who "so strutted and bellowed", that they had neither "the accent of Christians, nor the gait of Christian, pagan, nor man". This pleased; it was "praised, and that highly", by hearers, accustomed to Titus Andronicus, and the horrible tragedies of Marlowe, Kyd, and Chettle; but our poet and his sensitive Hamlet were grieved to the soul, and he would gladly have "whipped" these disqualified noise-makers who "imitated humanity so abominably". With regard to the comic plays, the one character of Tarlton, and what we know of himself and his plays, is sufficient to denote the previous state of things. Shakespeare could still have seen him; he died 1588. Born in the lowest station, according to one, originally a swine-herd, to another, a water-carrier, from his wonderful humour he appeared at the court and on the stage at the same time. The tricks and jests, which are related of him, are a counterpart to our own Eulenspiegel, and Claus the fool. There was scarcely a more popular man in England at his time; they associated him with the mythical representative of the popular humour, Robin Goodfellow, of whom English legends recount the same tricks as our popular books of Eulenspiegel; they called him his fellow, and wrote after his death a dialogue between Robin and Tarlton's ghost. He was at once the people's fool, the court fool, and the stage fool. In life, on the circuits of his troops, amongst the lowest company, he practised knavish tricks and wit from the impulse of his nature; at the court, as a servant of Elizabeth, he spoke

more truths to the queen than most of her chaplains, and cured her melancholy better than all her physicians. Upon the stage he was no otherwise than in life. Small, ugly, rather squinting, flat-nosed, he enlivened his hearers, even if he spoke not a word, if he only showed his head on the stage; with the same words, which in the lips of another would have been indifferent, he made the most melancholy laugh. But with this applause he committed an abuse, which was inconsistent with true art. He and the fools of his time regarded the play in which they acted, not otherwise than the court and the streets, where they continued their part, which was always the same. They remained on the stage not merely in certain scenes, but during the whole piece; they improvised their jests as occasion offered, they conversed, disputed, bantered with their hearers and their hearers with them, and in these contests Tarlton was pre-eminent. After his death, William Kempe, who was his pupil, became the inheritor of his fame and tricks; he played in Shakespeare's company, but twice separated from it, once just about the time, in which Hamlet was written. Very possibly Shakespeare alluded to him in the famous passage, which is plainly condemnatory of this kind of acting. "Let those, that play your clowns," he says, "speak no more than is set down for them: for there be of them, that will themselves laugh, to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh too: though in the mean time some necessary question of the play be then to be considered: that's villainous, and shows a most pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it." It is certain, that from the time of Shakespeare's appearance, this ingenious waste of art was renounced. In a comedy of 1640, Brome looks back upon the

time of Tarlton and Kempe, when the fools lavished their wit, whilst the poets spared their own for better use, as upon a remote period, in which the stage was not free from barbarisms.

From these exaggerations of jest and earnestness, Shakespeare recalled the players to truth and simplicity. The actor who through diffidence failed in his part, the other, who through arrogance overdid his character, were to him both alike unqualified. To raise the actor above reality, as far as the art demands this elevation, must always be left to the poet; if the latter possesses the ideal vein, by which in his poetry he overcomes the baseness of common truth and reality, then the actor has to devote all his powers, to give to his elevated and art-ennobled language the whole simple truth and fidelity of nature. This is the meaning of those immortal words which Hamlet offered as a positive rule in opposition to the method he had rejected, words which should be written in gold on the inside of every stage-curtain. In our own days, the actors are scarcely to be found, who even understand how to deliver these words according to their sense; and yet only he, who knows how to follow them throughout his art, is on the sure path to become a great actor. "Speak the speech," so the passage reads, "trippingly on the tongue; but if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as lief the town-crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus; but use all gently: for in the very torrent, tempest, and as I may say, whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance, that may give it smoothness. Be not too tame neither, but let your own discretion be your tutor: suit the action to the word, the

word to the action, with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature; for anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first, and now, was, and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time, his form and pressure. Now this overdone, or come tardy off, though it make the unskilful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve; the censure of which one must, in your allowance, o'erweigh a whole theatre of others." Certainly, nothing could be more condemnatory, than if we should apply these words as a test to that which we now call histrionic art; but on the other hand nothing would be grander, than if they *could*, in any case, be applied to this art, without condemning it.

These golden rules remained in Shakespeare's time and company no mere precepts. Richard Burbadge in the histrionic art was the twin-genius to which Shakespeare's poetry could offer nothing too hard nor too difficult. Born probably three years later than our poet, Burbadge died three years after him. This took place, at the same time as the death of James' queen, Anne; his loss was more deeply deplored than hers, to the great displeasure of the courtly world. "He's gone", is the lament of an elegy upon his death,

"And with him what a world are dead!
 Take him for all in all, he was a man,
 Not to be matched, and no age ever can.
 What a wide world was in that little space!
 Himself a world — the Globe his fittest place!"

His acting must have been the practice of Hamlet's theory, the representation of Shakespeare's poetry; and on the other hand the poetry of Shakespeare rose higher by the influence

of his histrionic art. "*He made a poet*", is the proud language of the elegy before-quoted; for having Burbadge to give forth each line, it filled their brain with fury more divine. In prose and poetry his contemporaries speak with enthusiasm of his graceful appearance on the stage, which although he was small of stature, was "beauty to the eye and music to the ear". He never went off the stage but with applause; he alone gave life unto a play, which was "dead, as 'twas by the authors writ"; so long as he was present, he enchained eye and ear with such magic force, that no one had power to speak or look another way. In voice and gesture he possessed all that is enchanting; so did his speech, says the elegy, become him, and his pace suited with his speech; and every action graced both alike, whilst not a word fell without just weight to balance it. A delightful Proteus, he transformed his whole acting and appearance with facility from the old Lear to the youthful Pericles; every thought and every feeling could be read plainly marked upon his countenance. In his pantomime, he was aided by the art of pourtraying, which, if we may credit the eulogies upon him, he practised with equal skill as his histrionic art. This one trait, which we know of his intellectual history, intimates that with him, no less than with Shakespeare, success was achieved by labour, that each added to his unusual natural talents unusual industry and study, that with the ability he possessed, he might not remain behind the gifts he had received. In Shakespeare's plays he acted every most difficult part; in really comic characters alone, he never appeared. From positive testimony we know, that he played Hamlet, Richard III., Shylock, the prince and king Henry V., Romeo, Brutus, Othello,

Lear, Macbeth, Pericles, and Coriolanus. Though as it is insinuated in Hamlet there were in that day as in the present, certain distinct parts, such as the king, the hero, the lover, the villain, we see that these were not for Burbadge. His acting in the most diverse parts must have been ever equally great: he seemed to seek the rarest difficulties, and his Shakespeare to offer them to him. Very possibly, Shakespeare only produced Pericles to give his friend an opportunity of exhibiting to the spectator in a few hours a shattered life in every degree of age. If so much may be inferred from the allusions in the elegy on Burbadge's death, in which his principal parts are designated here and there with some characteristic token, he ventured in Hamlet, what no actor has ventured since nor will venture: according to the direction of the poet he represented the hero in that weak, fat corpulency, so readily produced by want of movement and activity, and in moments of the greatest passion, with that "scant of breath" peculiar to such organization. "One of his chief parts wherein, beyond the rest, he mov'd the heart, was", according to the elegy, "the grieved Moor". That one epithet seems to say, that he penetrated into the depth of Shakespeare's character, and in his acting placed the main importance upon the sorrow of disappointment, which precedes that return of chaos, the unrestrained rage of jealousy, upon that point, where the character of Othello must certainly be developed, if he is not to appear a weak unrestrained barbarian, and the piece itself a cruel outrage. The depth of intellect and of feeling in this conception, if we do not impute too much to that one word, were equally to be admired. But the climax of his acting must have been Richard III. The poet has

here united everything, which can create unconquerable difficulties for an actor. An insignificant ugly being, who at the same time acts like a hero in valour, and fascinates as a seducer of beauty; the key-note in these discordant touches being a masterly hypocrisy, which imposes upon the actor, to represent the *actor in life* upon the stage, — such a task surpasses everything, which the art could at any time have offered as a difficulty. The anecdote of the citizen's wife enchanted by Burbadge's acting in Richard, which we mentioned before, whether true or invented, shows that he must have excellently represented the amiable side of the smooth hypocrite; the emphasis which he placed on the powerful side of the character, is attested by another more authenticated anecdote, which proves the inextinguishable impression he made by it upon the grosser children of nature. There is extant by a bishop Corbet the poetical description of a journey, which the author made in England. He records here, years after Burbadge's death, how he came to Bosworth. His host relates to him the battle of Bosworth, where Richard III. fell, as if he had been there, or had examined all the historians; the bishop discovers, that he had merely seen Shakespeare's play in London; and this is confirmed, when at the most animated part he forgot himself, and mingled art and history: "A kingdom for a horse, cries Richard," thus he meant to say, but he said Burbadge instead of Richard.

Burbadge's rival was Edward Alleyn; although he did not belong to Shakespeare's company, it is just to mention him. Collier has given his Memoirs in the publications of the Shakespeare society. He played probably as early as 1580, and was already in 1592 in great repute. He pleased most

in the more elevated characters, but he must also have appeared in comic parts, because it was boasted of him, that he had surpassed Tarlton and Kempe. He acted the heroes in Greene's and Marlowe's pieces, Orlando, Barabas, Faust, and Tamburlaine, and the public seem to have disputed over the superiority of his play and Burbadge's. Whether he ever acted in the Shakespeare pieces, is doubtful; he played Lear, Henry VIII., Pericles, Romeo, and Othello; but it is conjectured, that the pieces were adopted upon the other stage with emendation. As the companies of Burbadge - Shakespeare and Alleyn, played together at Newington-Butts, 1594—96, during the building of the Globe, it is still possible, that a compromise was made, which granted to Alleyn the use of the Shakespeare pieces. That Alleyn really equalled Burbadge we may doubt. His inclination, like Shakespeare's, did not long remain faithful to his profession and art; he left the stage occasionally as early as 1597, and for ever in 1606. We may remark that from that time, except in money-transactions, he had nothing more to do with stage and actors. He had acquired great possessions, certainly not merely through his dramatic profits: he ultimately owned the manors of Dulwich and Lewisham, was the single proprietor of the Fortune, and the principal sharer in the Blackfriars theatre; besides this he possessed lands in Yorkshire, and property in Bishopsgate and in the parish of Lambeth. Simple, frugal, charitable, he was ever a kind and noble man; as he had no family, he determined to employ his riches in the establishment of Dulwich College, a hospital for the aged poor and a school for the young. The foundation of this great institution was celebrated in 1619, seven years

before Alleyn's death; the actor put to shame the evil slanderers of the profession, and it is a singular incident, that the same clergyman Stephen Gosson, who long before had so violently denounced plays and players, was a near spectator of this benevolent establishment.

Such was the state of things when Shakespeare settled in London, and entered that company of Burbadge's, where he found his fellow-citizens. He himself trod the stage as an actor. At that period, when dramas were not written for the sake of readers, when the separation between histrionic art and dramatic poetry had not yet taken place, it was not unusual, that dramatic poets should be actors also; Greene, Marlowe, Peele, Ben Jonson, Heywood, Webster, Field, and others, united both arts. With regard to Shakespeare's perfection in the art, the expressions of his contemporaries, and the traditions of his biographers appear to be at variance. Chettle calls him excellent in his art; Aubrey says "he did act exceedingly well", Rowe, on the contrary, that he was a mediocre performer. Perhaps these accounts are less contradictory than they appear. Collier's supposition that Shakespeare only played short parts, in order to be less disturbed in writing, appears natural and probable. We know that he acted the Ghost of Hamlet's father, and this part, it is said, was "the top of his performance"; and one of his brothers, probably Gilbert, at an advanced age, remembered having seen him in the character of Adam in "As you like it". These are subordinate but important parts; with justice did Thomas Campbell say, that the Ghost in Hamlet demanded a good, if not a great actor. It was at that time a usual custom, which also denotes the greater perfection of the scenic art,

that players of rank acted several parts, some very insignificant ones as well as the chief characters: this gave a harmony to the whole, preserved uniformity of the enjoyment and of the artistic impression, and enabled the poet to give distinction and life even to these subordinate figures. If Shakespeare, therefore, in order to pursue his poetic calling, played only shorter parts, this is no argument against his histrionic qualifications; if he played many parts of the kind mentioned, it is rather in favour of them. Yet this circumstance itself prevented his ever arriving at extraordinary perfection or preeminence in this branch of art. Besides the comparisons not only with Burbadge, but of the actor Shakespeare with the poet Shakespeare were at hand, in both of which the actor Shakespeare stood at a disadvantage. But that which prevented him most intrinsically from becoming so great an actor as a poet, was his moral antipathy to this profession. This would have ever restrained him from the attainment of the highest degree of this art, even if it had not induced him early to quit the stage. But to these events we shall return more at length.

SHAKESPEARE'S FIRST DRAMATIC ATTEMPTS.

We have endeavoured to point out the condition of the stage upon which Shakespeare entered on his settling in London, and the state of dramatic poetry, in the nurture and progress of which he now stood by the side of Marlowe and Greene, Lodge and Chettle. In the first short period of his dramatic writings, we see him more or less biassed by the peculiarities of this poetry, but we observe at the same time, how rapidly he sought to disengage himself from the want of design, from the harshness and rudeness of their productions; in the beginning a subject scholar, he appears soon as a rising master. This comparative relation of Shakespeare to his contemporaries is illustrated by the fact, that his early pieces were only elaborations of older existing dramas, which we partly possess for comparison; that the elaborator soon raised himself above his prototypes, and after a few years towered like a giant over them. *Pericles* and *Titus*, the one from internal evidence, the other from received notice, are amongst these pieces by another hand, only worked up by Shakespeare. The first part of *Henry VI.* betrays at least the touches of three hands. The original of the two last parts, which Shakespeare followed step by

step with his file, is still preserved. In the Comedy of Errors, an English play, founded on the *Menæchmi* of Plautus, probably lay before the poet; the taming of the Shrew is worked after a rougher piece. These seven plays we hold, in accordance with most English critics, to be the first dramatic attempts of our poet, and we shall now in succession glance over them. We will watch the creative mind of the young poet in the workshop in which indeed he was still to be formed himself.

TITUS ANDRONICUS AND PERICLES.

It is undisputed that *Titus Andronicus*, if a work of Shakespeare's at all, is one of his earliest writings. Ben Jonson (in the Induction to *Bartholomew Fair*) said in the year 1614, that the *Andronicus*, by which he could hardly allude to any other piece, had been acted 25 or 30 years; it would, therefore, in any case have been produced in the first years of Shakespeare's life in London. There may be few, however, among the readers who cherish Shakespeare, who would not wish to have it proved, that this piece did not proceed from the poet's pen. This wish is met by a remark of one Ravenscroft, who, in 1687, remodelled this tragedy, and who had heard from an old judge of stage-matters, that the piece came from another author, and that Shakespeare had only added "some master-touches to one or two of the principal characters". Among the masters of English criticism, the best opinions are divided. Collier and Knight assign it unhesitatingly to Shakespeare, and the former even thinks in accordance with his opinion upon Marlowe, that as a poetical production the piece has not had justice

done to it. Nathan Drake, Coleridge (some passages excepted), Ingleby, absolutely reject it, and Alex. Dyce believes that the Yorkshire tragedy had more claims than Titus to be numbered among the Shakespeare writings.

That which we wish, we willingly believe. But in this case great and important reasons in evidence of Shakespeare's authorship, stand opposed to the wish and the ready belief. The express testimony of a learned contemporary, Meres, who in the year 1598 mentions a list of Shakespeare's plays, places Titus positively among them. The friends of Shakespeare received it in the edition of his works. Neither of these facts certainly contradicts the tradition of Ravenscroft, but at all events they prevent the piece being expunged without examination as supposititious.

In accordance with these contradictory external testimonies, it seems that internal evidence also, and the arguments deduced from it, lead rather to doubt than to certainty. It is true that Titus Andronicus belongs in matter as in style entirely to the older school which was set aside by Shakespeare. Reading it in the midst of his works, we do not feel at home in it; but if the piece is perused in turn with those of Kyd and Marlowe, the reader finds himself upon the same ground. He who, agitated by Shakespeare's most awful tragedies, enters into the accumulated horrors of this drama, perceives without effort the difference that exists between that liberal art, which sympathizes in the terribleness of the evil it depicts and quickly passes over it, and for that reason suffers no evil to overtake men, which cannot be laid to their own guilt and nature, and the rudeness here, which unfeelingly takes pleasure in suffering innocence in paraded sorrow, in tongues cut out, and hands hewn off, set

forth in the complacent diffuseness of description. He who compares the most wicked of all the characters which Shakespeare depicted, with this Aaron who cursed "the day in which he did not some notorious ill", will feel that in the one some remnant of humanity is ever preserved, while in the other a "ravenous tiger" commits unnatural deeds and speaks unnatural language. But if the whole impression, which we receive from this barbarous subject and its treatment, speaks with almost overwhelming conviction against the Shakespeare origin of the piece, it is well also to remember all the circumstances of the poet and his time, which can counterbalance this conviction. The refinement of feeling, which the poet acquired in his maturity, was not of necessity equally the attribute of his youth. If the piece, such as it is, were the work of his youthful pen, we must conclude that a mighty, indeed almost violent revolution early transformed his moral and æsthetic nature, and as it were with one blow. Such a change, however, took place even in the far less powerful poetic natures of our own Goethe and Schiller; it has in some more or less conspicuous degree *at any rate* taken place in Shakespeare. The question might be asked, whether in the first impetuosity of youth, which so readily is driven to misanthropical moods, this violent expression of hatred, of revenge, of bloodthirstiness, conspicuous throughout the piece, denotes more, in such a man, at such a time, than Schiller's Robbers, than Gerstenberg's Ugolino did, written in Germany in the 18th century, for a far more civilized generation. When a poet of such self-reliance as Shakespeare, ventured his first essay, he might have been tempted to compete with the most victorious of his contemporaries; this was Marlowe. To strike

him with his own weapons, would be the surest path to ready conquest. And how should an embryo poet disdain this path? At that period scenes of blood and horror were not so rare on the great stage of real life as with us; upon the stage of art they commended a piece to the hearers to whom the stronger stimulant was the more agreeable. It is clear from Ben Jonson's before-mentioned testimony, that *Titus* was a welcome piece, which continued in favour on the stage, just as much as Schiller's "Robbers". With this approval of the people, the author of *Titus* could claim yet higher approbation. Whoever he might be, he was imbued just as much as the poet of *Venus and Lucrece*, with the fresh remembrances of the classical school; latin quotations, a predilection for Ovid and Virgil, for the tales of Troy and the Trojan party, constant references to the old mythology and history, prevail throughout the piece. An allusion to Sophocles' *Ajax*, and similarity to passages of Seneca have been discovered in it. Certainly all the tragic legends of Rome and Greece were present to the poet, and we know that they are full of terrible matters. The learned poet gathered them together, in order to compose his drama and its action from the most approved poetical material of the ancients. When *Titus* disguises his revenge before Tamora, he plays the part of Brutus; when he stabs his daughter, that of *Virginius*; the dreadful fate of *Lavinia* is the fable of *Tereus and Progne*; the revenge of *Titus* on the sons of Tamora that of *Atreus and Thyestes*; other traits remind of *Æneas and Dido*, of *Lucretia and Coriolanus*. Forming his one fable from these shreds of many fables, and uniting the materials of many old tragedies into one, the poet might believe himself most surely to have surpassed Seneca

The inference drawn from the subject and contents of the play, concerns its form also. With Coleridge the metre and style alone decided against its authenticity. Shakespeare had nowhere else written in this regular blank verse. The diction, for the most part imageless, without the thoughtful tendency to rare expressions, to unusual catastrophes, to reflective sayings and sentences, is not like Shakespeare. This grand typhon-like bombast in the mouth of the Moor, and this exaggerated mimic play of rage, is in truth that out-heroding Herod, which we see the poet so abhor in Hamlet. Yet even here the objection may be raised, that it was natural for a beginner like Shakespeare to allow himself to be carried away by the false taste of the age, that it was easy for a talent like his to imitate this heterogeneous style. If we had no testimony to the genuineness of Shakespeare's narrative poems, scarcely would any one have considered even them as his writing. Just as well as with a master's hand he could imitate the conceits of the pastorals, the lyric of the Italians, and the tone of the popular Saxon song, just as well, indeed with far more ease, could he affect the noisy style of a Kyd and a Marlowe. At the same time we must confess that at least here and there the diction is not quite alien to Shakespeare. The second act possesses much of that Ovid luxuriance, of that descriptive power, and of those conceits, which we find also in *Venus and Lucrece*, of which indeed single passages and expressions remind us. It was in these passages that even Coleridge perceived the hand of Shakespeare, and he had in these matters the keenest perception.

Amid these conflicting doubts, these opposing considerations, we more readily acquiesce in Ravenscroft's tradition,

that Shakespeare only worked up in Titus an older piece. The whole indeed sounds less like the early work of a great genius, than the production of a mediocre mind, which in a certain self-satisfied security felt itself already at its apex. But that which, in our opinion, decides against the Shakespeare authorship, is the coarseness of the characteristics, the lack of the most ordinary probability in the actions, and the unnatural motives assigned to them. The *style* of a young writer may be perverted, his *taste* almost necessarily at first goes astray; but what lies deeper than all this exterior and ornament of art, the estimate of men, the deduction of motives of action, the general contemplation of human nature, this is the power of an innate talent, which under the guidance of a sound instinct, is usually developed at an early stage of life. Whatever piece of Shakespeare's we hold to be his first, everywhere, even in his narratives, the characters are delineated with a firm hand; the lines may be weak and faint, but nowhere are they drawn as here with a harsh and distorted touch. And besides, for the most fantastical matters in the traditions which Shakespeare undertook to dramatize, he knew how to find the most natural motives, and this even in his earliest pieces, but nowhere has he grounded as here the story of his play upon the most apparent improbability. We need only remember the leading features of the piece and its hero. Titus, by military glory placed in a position to dispose of the Imperial throne of Rome, in generous loyalty creates Saturninus emperor, against the will of his sons he gives him his daughter Lavinia already betrothed to Bassianus, and in his faithful zeal he even kills one of his refractory children. At the same time he gives to the new emperor the captive Gothic queen Tamora,

whose son he had just slaughtered as a sacrifice for his fallen children. The emperor sees her, leaves Lavinia, and marries Tamora; and Titus, who thus experienced the base ingratitude of him whose benefactor he had been, expects now thanks from Tamora for her elevation, when he had just before murdered her son! The revengeful woman on the contrary commands her own sons to slay Bassianus and to dishonour and mutilate Lavinia. The father, Titus, does not guess the author of the revengeful act; the daughter hears the authors of the deed guessed and talked over, she hears her brothers accused of having murdered her husband Bassianus; her tongue cut out, she cannot speak, but it seems also as if she could not hear; they ask her not, she cannot even shake her head at all their false conjectures. At length *by accident* the way is found to put a staff in her mouth, by which she writes in the sand the names of the guilty perpetrators. The dull blusterer who hitherto has been Brutus indeed and in the literal sense of the word, now *acts* the part of Brutus, and now the crafty Tamora suffers herself to be allured into the snares of revenge, by the same clumsy dissimulation as that by which Titus himself had been deceived. Whoever compares this rough psychological art with the fine touches, with which in the poet's first production, Venus and Adonis, even amid the perversion of an over-refined descriptive style, those two figures are so agreeably and truly delineated, that the painter might without trouble copy them from the hand of the poet, will consider it scarcely possible, that the same poet, even in his greatest errors, could have arrived at such a deadening of that finer nature, which he nowhere else discards.

If it be asked, how were it possible that Shakespeare

with this finer nature could ever have chosen such a piece even for the sake alone of appropriating it to his stage, we must not forget, that the young poet must always in his taste do homage to the multitude, and that in the beginning of his career, speculation upon their applause would stimulate him, rather than the commands and laws of an ideal of art. This must explain likewise the choice of *Pericles*; even if it should be proved that Shakespeare did not undertake the elaboration of this piece until a riper period. How readily the great genius delights for a time in trifling with the puny subject, of which he sees his assembled hearers susceptible! Thus our own Goethe also did not disdain occasionally to vary the text of the "magic flute", and to imitate the comic characters of very subordinate comedies! Such pieces as *Titus* and *Pericles* lay within the horizon of the common hearers; that *Pericles* by good fortune had obtained great applause, we know from express testimony; upon the titles of different editions it is called a "much admired play", in prologues of other dramas it is spoken of as a fortunate piece; the prologue of *Pericles* itself says that this song "had been sung at festivals", and that "lords and ladies in their lives have read it for restoratives". This popularity proceeded from the subject, taken originally from a Greek romance, of the 5th or 6th century. The story, whose hero only on the English stage is called *Pericles*, and everywhere else *Apollo-nius of Tyre*, passed from the Pantheon of *Godfred of Viterbo* into all languages and countries, in romances, popular narratives, and poems. In England the incidents had been already translated into Anglo-Saxon; and the poet of our play may have had two English versions of them for use, in *Lawrence Twine's* prose translation from the *Gesta Roma-*

norum (the *Patterne of Painfull Adventures*, 1576), and in the poetic narrative of the *Confessio Amantis* (before 1393) by John Gower, the contemporary of Chaucer; both sources are published in Collier's "Shakespeare's Library". The story of Apollonius was among the number of those favourite romances, whose fictions in the time previous to Shakespeare so often used to be manufactured into dramas. The multiplicity of adventures and facts attracted the sight-loving people, as with us the romantic plays of Kotzebue for a time enjoyed great applause by the side of the works of Goethe and Schiller. The fondness for the subject of Pericles was transferred from the epic form to the dramatic, however rudely it was here treated. In *Pericles* the art of transforming a narrative into a lively dramatic action, the very art of which Shakespeare was from an early period entirely master, is quite in its infancy. The epos is only partly transposed into scenes; what could not be represented, as the prologue itself says, was made "plain with speech" or pantomimic action; the prologues are very significantly placed in the lips of the old narrator Gower; he introduces the piece, as it were, and carries it on with narrative when the scene ceases; like a balladsinger with his puppets, he explains the mute scene in iambics of four feet, and in the antique language of the old sources, which sounded in Shakespeare's time as the droll verses of Hans Sachs do to us. With good humour the prologue himself smiles at the quickly changing scene, in which the spectator hastily passes over the life of the hero from his youth to extreme age; he carries "winged time post on the lame feet of his rhyme", and calls to aid the imagination of his hearers that he may "longest leagues make short, and sail seas in cockles". There is here no unity

of action, but only unity of person; there is here no inner necessity for the occurrences, but an outer force, a blind chance shapes the adventures of the hero. Nor does a unity of thought, such as Shakespeare ever has as the soul of his pieces, unite the parts of the play; at the most a moral tendency connects the beginning and the end of it. At the close of the piece itself, the dramatic poet places in the lips of Gower, in whose narrative he had already met with this same moral, a demonstration of the glaring moral contrast between the daughter of Antiochus, who in the midst of prosperity, without temptation and allurements, lived in "monstrous lust", and the daughter of Pericles, who "assailed with fortune fierce and keen", amid the snares of power and seduction, preserves her virtue, and makes saints out of sinners. As in *Titus Andronicus*, the idea of representing the passion of revenge in its pure and impure motives and varieties, is adhered to in its repeated gratification, so here the contrast of chastity and unchastity is the moral lesson, which, after the manner of the *Moralities*, glances forth plainly and glaringly at the beginning and end of the piece; far from that artistic refinement, with which Shakespeare usually conceals his moral lessons by the veil of facts and actions. Yet, however energetically in *Pericles* the moral is brought forward, the middle scenes of the piece have no connection with this thought, unless it be by explaining how the heroine of the second part of the play was born, or by conducting the hero from his youth in a series of poor and barren scenes to his old age. All English critics are agreed in refusing Shakespeare the outline of this fantastic, rude, and badly versified play; we know that there was an older drama of this name; to this then Shakespeare added some

passages, which could be more justly termed "master-touches" than those which he may have placed to Titus.

Whoever reads Pericles with attention, readily finds that all those scenes, in which there is a natural design in the subject, in which great passions are developed, especially the scenes in which Pericles and Marina act, stand forth in evident fulness from the barrenness of the whole. Shakespeare's hand is here unmistakable; so in the fine treatment of Antiochus' crime at the commencement of the piece; in the scene of the storm at sea (III. 1.); most especially in the last act, where the meeting of Pericles and his daughter, — a scene which already in Twine's narration possesses peculiar attraction, — forms a description, which can rank with the best performances of the poet. The profound character of the speeches, the metaphors, the significant brevity, and natural dignity, all the peculiar characteristics of Shakespeare's diction are here exhibited. Even these perfect and richer scenes are only sketches; the treatment even of the two principal characters is also a sketch; but they are masterly sketches, which stand in a strange contrast of tenderness with the broad details of the barbarous characters in Titus. It is an unusual part, which Marina has to play in the house of crime; the poet found these scenes in the old narrations; it was for him to verify them in the character. But such as this Marina appears, arming envy with her charms and gifts, and *disarming* persecution; as she comes forward on the stage strewing flowers for the grave of her nurse; sweet tender creature, who "never kill'd a mouse, nor hurt a fly", who trod upon a worm against her will and wept for it; as her father describes her as "a palace for the crown'd truth to dwell in;

as Patience, smiling extremity out of act"; such as we see her in all this, she is indeed a nature, which appears capable of remaining unsullied amid the impurest, and as her persecutor says, of making "a puritan of the devil". This character is sufficiently apparent; that of Pericles lies deeper. Nathan Drake found him buoyant with hope, ardent in enterprise, a model of knighthood, the devoted servant of glory and of love. So much may praise be misplaced. This romantic sufferer exhibits rather features of character entirely opposed to chivalrous feeling. His depth of soul and intellect, a touch of melancholy, produces in him that painful sensitiveness, which indeed as long as he is unsuspecting, leaves him indifferent to danger, but after he has once perceived the evil of men, renders him more fainthearted than bold, more agitated and uneasy than enterprising. The motives, which induce him to venture the dangerous wooing of Antiochus' daughter, the poet has not beforehand depicted, but subsequently intimated. The man, who when he perceives the dishonour of the house into which he has fallen, recognizes so quickly and acutely the danger that threatens him, who penetrates in a moment the wicked nature of the sinning father, when he remarks, that he blushes no more for his own shame, and upon its discovery "seem'd not to strike, but smooth", who, as modest as he is prudent, ventures not to name openly, scarcely to himself, the perceived connection, and considers in deep thought his position; the man, who speaks riddles, proves that he is able also to solve them. And he, whose imagination, after fear has been once excited in him, is filled with ideas of a thousand dangers, whose mind is seized with the darkest melancholy, he appears in these traits also to be a nature of such prominent mental qualities,

that trusting rather to these than to chance, he ventured to undertake to guess the dangerous riddle of the daughter of Antiochus. Agitation, fear, and mistrust, now drive him out into the wide world, and excite him in his happiness at Pentapolis, as in his danger in Antiochia; bending himself to adversity, more noble and tender than daring, he carefully conceals himself, and in a perfectly different position fears the same snares as with Antiochus; these are without doubt intentional additions by the last worker, for in the story and in the English narrations of it, Pericles declares at first his name and origin. The feeling nature of his character, which makes him careful in moments of quiet action, renders him excited in misfortune, and robs him of the power of resistance in suffering. The same violent emotion, the same sinking into melancholy, the same change of his innermost feelings, which he remarks in himself in the first act after his adventure in Antiochia, we see again rising in him after the supposed death of his wife and child; as at that time, he again casts himself upon the wide world and yields to immoderate grief, forgetful of men and of his duties, until the unknown daughter restores him to himself, and he at the same time recovers wife and child. The ecstatic transition from sorrow to joy is here intimated in the same masterly manner, as before the sudden decline from hope and happiness into melancholy and mourning. We said above, that this is only sketched in outline; but there is a large scope left to a great actor, to shape this outline into a complete form by the finishing strokes of his representation. We therefore conjectured before, that Shakespeare might have chosen this piece, in all other parts highly insignificant and trifling,

only to prepare a difficult theme for his friend Burbadge, who acted this character.

We should consider this almost a decided matter, if the piece had been first worked at by Shakespeare in the year 1609, when it appeared for the first time in print with the words "lately presented" on the title-page. In this case we should have here discussed the piece in the wrong place. Dryden, however, in a Prologue, which he wrote in 1675 to the *Circe* of Charles Davenant, calls it expressly Shakespeare's first piece, and excuses on that account its discrepancies. We must confess, it is difficult to believe, that even with such a purpose as that which we have stated, Shakespeare should, at the period of his greatest maturity, have adopted such a piece as *Pericles* for the first time. If we compare the revolting scenes of the fourth act with similar ones in *Measure for Measure*, a piece which was written before 1609, we reluctantly believe that Shakespeare could have prepared this overseasoned food for the million, or even should have suffered it to remain from the hand of another. We should therefore prefer (with Staunton,) to assume that Shakespeare appropriated the piece, soon after its origin, from the hand of the first poet (about 1590). At the time, when the play was printed with Shakespeare's name, in 1609, it may then perhaps have been prepared again for Burbadge's acting, and through this have acquired its new fame. That it at that time excited fresh sensation, is perceived by the fact that from the performance of the piece and from Twine's version of the story, a novel was composed in 1608 by George Wilkens*: "the true history of

* Reprinted from a copy in the Zurich Library, by Tycho Mommsen. Oldenb. 1857.

the play of *Pericles*, as it was lately presented by the worthy and ancient Poet John Gower." In this publication, we may read the iambic versés and passages of the piece transposed into prose, but in a manner that allows us to infer that the play at that time was reprinted in a more perfect form than that in which we now read it. Shakespeare's pen (so easily is it to be distinguished) is recognized in this prose version in expressions which are not to be found in the drama, but which must have been used upon the stage. When *Pericles* (Act III. sc. 1.) receives the child born in the tempest, he says to it: "Thou'rt the rudeliest welcome to this world that e'er was prince's child." To this, the novel (p. 44. ed. Mommsen) adds the epithet: "Poor inch of nature!" merely three words, in which every one must recognize our poet. Thus we probably read this drama in a form which it neither bore when Shakespeare put his hand to it for the first nor for the last time.

HENRY VI.

Our remarks upon the two pieces, which we have discussed, were essentially of a critical nature, for indeed it was of less importance to determine their trifling value, than their origin, and the share which Shakespeare had in them. In the three parts also of the "History of Henry VI.," the discussion for the most part will be of a critical nature, but especially that upon the first part, the consideration of which must be perfectly separate from that of the two last. The two last parts of Henry VI. are worked up by Shakespeare from an existing original, which may have early

suggested to our poet the idea, not alone by additions to appropriate them to his stage, but also to append to them the whole series of his histories, and this not only with regard to the facts, but even to the leading idea. For the first part, on the contrary, we possess no sources; in its tenor it is but very slightly united with the two last parts, and this union was not originally contained in the piece. The latter parts afford the counterpart to Shakespeare's Richard II. and Henry IV.; as these plays treat of the elevation of the house of Lancaster, those refer to the retribution of the house of York; the first part, on the other hand, treated in its original form only of the French wars under Henry VI., and the civil discord, which occasioned the losses in France. The satirist Thomas Nash, in his "Pierce Penniless' supplication to the Devil", 1592, alludes to a piece, in which the "brave Talbot", the dread of the French, is raised from the tomb "to triumph again on the stage". Whether this allusion refer to our drama or to another Henry VI., which, as we know, was acted in 1592 by Henslowe's company, it is evident that this is indeed the essential subject of our piece; what relates to the rising York and his political plans, was without doubt added by Shakespeare, to unite the play with the two others. That Shakespeare had further share in the piece than this, is almost with certainty to be denied. From Malone's ample dissertation upon the three parts of Henry VI. until Dyce, all authorship of this first part is in England generally refused to our poet. The extraordinary ostentation of manifold learning in the play is not like Shakespeare; nor is the style of composition. Coleridge enjoins the comparison of Bedford's speech at the beginning of the piece with the blank-verse in Shakespeare's first genuine plays,

and "if you do not then feel the impossibility of its having been written by Shakespeare," he says, "you may have ears, — for so has another animal, — but an ear you cannot have". If the subject induced the poet to appropriate the piece as a supplement to the completion of the two following parts, without question his share in it is a very small one. That he himself, after the custom of the time, originally composed the piece in company with other poets, is not credible, because a man of Shakespeare's self-reliance must have early felt the unnaturalness of this habit. It is on the other hand probable that the piece, which he elaborated, had occupied different hands at the same time, because the marks of them are plainly to be discerned.

No piece is more adapted to the explanation of the manner in which Shakespeare as soon as he was himself, did *not write* his dramatic works. His historical plays follow for the most part the historical facts of the well-known chronicle of Holinshed, and adhere rigorously to succession and order, rejecting all fable. The first part of Henry VI., on the contrary, follows another historical narrative (Hall) and adds single events from Holinshed and other partly unknown sources; great historical errors, a medley of persons, a remarkable confusion in the computation of time, a series of non-historical additions, characterize the treatment of this history, treatment of which Shakespeare has never been guilty. The history of the Countess of Auvergne, the threefold cowardice of Fastolfe, the recapture of Orleans by Talbot, the surprise of Rouen, the apprehension of Margaret by Suffolk, are mere inventions, partly proceeding from patriotic zeal. Such did not appear to be Shakespeare's general idea of a dramatic history which he through-

out as far as possible linked to the genuine matters of tradition. It is not our intention to set forth these historical errors, as we do not consider Shakespeare's historical plays from this point of view; we venture simply to refer to Courtenay's Commentaries upon the historical dramas of the poet, in which this method of consideration is exclusively aimed at.

If we take the piece purely in a dramatic point of view, and consider it as a work for the stage, it offers, as we before said, in contrast to Shakespeare's general mode of proceeding, an excellent instruction. There is here no unity of action, indeed not even, as in *Pericles*, a unity of person. If we look strictly into the single scenes, they are so loosely united, that whole series may be expunged, without injuring the piece, nay indeed perhaps not without improving it: an attempt which even in *Pericles* could not be carried far. We need only superficially perceive this, in order to feel, how far removed the dramatic works of art previous to Shakespeare were from that strong and systematic inner structure, which admits of no dismemberment without distortion.

In this first part of *Henry VI.* the scene between Talbot and the Countess of Auvergne may be omitted, and the piece only loses an unessential addition, in a dramatic as well as in an historical aspect.

Suffolk's wooing of the captive Margaret may be expunged, and we find that then the third and fourth scenes of the fifth act more naturally blend into one scene; the execution of the Maid of Orleans, which is now uselessly postponed, is then joined to the former scene, without the necessity of changing a single line. If this scene be sup-

plementary, the last scene in connection with it, in which the king chooses Margaret for his queen, must likewise be an addition. We expunge that also, and we find that Winchester's treaty (Act V. sc. 4.) affords a perfect conclusion to the play, and one in far better accordance with its main substance.

The scenes of the death of Talbot and his son (Act. IV. sc. 6. 7.) stood without doubt in the original piece, as they relate to the principal hero, but it is impossible to impute them to the same author who wrote the principal parts of the drama. They are of a lyric elegiac colouring, in itself not without poetic beauty, but wholly undramatic. In direct opposition to Coleridge and Collier we should least of all conjecture the pen of Shakespeare in this sentimental vein.

The scene of Mortimer's death and his political "admonishments" to York may be taken away, without being missed. The following first scene of the third act is then more closely united with the previous dissensions. Yet more: we may withdraw the scene in the Temple Garden, where the strife between the white and the red rose begins, with all that which, as a sequel to this scene, refers to York, his pretensions to the throne and his dispute with Lancaster, and there remains behind a piece of greater unity, which treats of the French wars, and of the domestic factions, which disheartened the champions in France and occasioned the great fall of the English cause.

Even these effects of the spirit of faction in the course of the French contests do not appear to have been all in the original piece. The effect of the strife between Somerset and York in the course of the war and its influence upon

Talbot's death, appears from the bearing of the respective scenes to be an addition by the last elaborator. Talbot is in straits; the two dukes of Somerset and York are entreated for help by Lucy in two successive scenes (Act IV. Sc. 3. 4), which, in a perfectly different style, are inserted between the elegiac Talbot scenes; from natural enmity they refuse; on this account Lucy anticipates that Talbot will perish and laments his fall as if it had already happened. Now follows the scene of Talbot's death; scarcely in order to establish a superficial union with those two scenes, is York's name here mentioned; nothing of his quarrel with Somerset; then Lucy appears over Talbot's body, and mourns his death in a tone, as if he had known nothing of it, nor had even foreboded it!

If we separate all these scenes between York and Somerset, Mortimer and York, Margaret and Suffolk, and read them by themselves, we are looking, it seems, upon a series of scenes which discover Shakespeare's diction in his historical plays just in the manner in which we should have expected him to have written at the commencement of his career. Here is the skilful witty turn of speech and the germ of his figurative language, here already are the fine clever repartees, the more choice form of expression; here in Mortimer's death-scene and in the lessons of his deeply dissembled silent policy, which while dying he transmits to York, is, as Hallam also decides, all the genuine feeling and knowledge of human nature, which belongs to Shakespeare in similar pathetic or political scenes in his other dramas; all, not in that abundance and masterly power of later date, but certainly in the germ, which prefigures subsequent perfection. Those scenes then contrast decidedly

with those trivial tedious war-scenes, and the alternate bombastic and dull disputes between Gloster and Winchester; these parts adhere to the common highway of historical poetry, though they have, even such as they are, sufficient of the fresh matter of youthful art, to furnish Schiller in his *Maid of Orleans* with many beautiful traits, indeed with the principal idea of his drama. If we consider it as settled that Shakespeare first inserted all these scenes, we can fully explain for what reason he did so. They unite this first part, most closely with the second and third, with which these had before been without connection. York, the principal hero of the two last parts, here appears with his claims at the commencement of his career; Margaret, who next to him forms the most prominent figure, is here rising into note; the last scene of the first part is intentionally placed in the closest connection with the first scene of the second part. The later work of *Richard II.*, standing as it does in historical contrast to these parts of *Henry VI.*, is treated accordingly by Shakespeare in evident dramatic relation to this same added scene. As in *Richard II.*, the dangerous rise of the house of Lancaster issues from the single combat of Norfolk and Henry, so in *Henry VI.*, the strife of the two roses from the challenge between Vernon and Basset; as in the one, the weak Richard at first disregards and threatens Henry Bolingbroke, then spares and promotes him through forbearance, so in the other, the weak young Henry VI. emancipates the injured and dishonoured York to his own destruction. Thus indeed Shakespeare by the addition of these scenes has made the first part of *Henry VI.*, regarded as a separate piece, still more disconnected than it originally was, but he has on the other hand so united

the three parts, that they afford a perfect picture of the rule of Henry VI., and at the same time, in the rise of York, a complete counterpart to that of the house of Lancaster, the description of which he probably planned already during the elaboration of these three parts of Henry VI.

The two last parts of Henry VI., we may consider as a single play, as a dramatic chronicle in ten acts: neither in outer form nor in inner idea are the two pieces otherwise than mechanically divided. The events in France which formed the principal subject in the first part, are here removed to the farthest back-ground; the reader scarcely observes the short passages in which we learn that Somerset is sent to France, and this valuable possession is completely lost to England. The subject of the two last parts is the contest of the houses of York and Lancaster, the decline of England's power under the weak and saintly Henry VI., and the rise of York, the father of the terrible Richard III. Subsequently, we before said, Shakespeare furnished a counterpart to this work in the preceding elevation of the house of Lancaster, the rise of the similarly aspiring and crafty Bolingbroke above the equally weak but worldly Richard II. In the second part (Act. VI. sc. 1.) it is expressly indicated in a passage which is Shakespeare's property, that the fall of Henry VI. was an expiation of the unlawful murder of Richard II. by the Lancastrians. Other passages prove that Shakespeare had at hand the chronicles of Holinshed, when he remodelled the originals of the two latter parts: so he may have surveyed the whole history of the struggle between the two houses in this the first of his historic-dramatic works, and aware of its political and historical worth, have early conceived the plan of that

series of historical dramas, which he soon afterwards carried into execution.

We have already said that Shakespeare in the two last parts of Henry VI., only revised two pieces whose originals are preserved and were recently published by Halliwell in the writings of the Shakespeare-society.* To compare these works, which by a plausible conjecture are attributed to Robert Greene, with Shakespeare's elaborations, is to take a glance into the innermost workshop of his youthful poetic genius. If these dramas had done nothing more than to direct Shakespeare's eye to the higher world of history, for this alone, they would be, in the history of his mind, of the most decided importance.

Happy was it for the English stage, that in its early development it lighted upon these subjects of national history. In the sources from which dramatists were accustomed usually to draw, such as the chivalric romances of the middle ages, old fables and legends, tales and popular books of romantic tenor, the want of nature was great, the want of taste greater; the art of the dramatic poets was feeble; where the subject afforded a wide field for their free inventive powers, the work degenerated into distortion; as is the case in such

* Their titles are: "The first part of the contention betwixt the two famous houses of York and Lancaster", and "the true tragedy of Richard, duke of York"; the oldest impressions are dated 1594 and 1595, and do not bear Shakespeare's name. The tragedy of the Duke of York was acted by the servants of the Earl of Pembroke, for whom Greene wrote, but Shakespeare never. After Shakespeare's death, the two pieces in 1619 were published with his name by Pavier, who has also printed other doubtful and spurious plays of Shakespeare.

pieces as *Titus* and *Pericles*. In the simple and homely chronicles of their national history, on the other hand, the dramatists found in those civil wars a great powerful material, a nature congenial to their own, a nation in action whom they knew, prominent characters which were comprehensible to them, they found psychological truth stored-up and ready, for which they had vainly groped in their romantic attempts. At the very time that Shakespeare began to write, this national historical Drama, as we have seen above, threw out its first shoots. Among these early Histories we named the two pieces by Greene upon Henry VI.; they are superior to almost the whole series of pre-Shakespeare plays of this kind, the chronicle itself is often only transferred to them, and dryly arranged in scenes, but precisely this exhibits all the more clearly the value which rests, in the abstract, in an important subject, borrowed from simple nature.

The general reader is not acquainted with these two plays and cannot, therefore, compare them with Shakespeare's elaboration of them; but it is necessary to speak of them as they are in their original form, in order to show what they offered to Shakespeare, what was suggestive in them for his historical Dramas, and what he added in his own Henry VI.

When Tieck says that in plan, nothing of Shakespeare's, not even his noblest and best, can be compared with the historical tragedy of Henry VI., and that the mind of the poet increases in it with the subject, when Ulrici declares the composition to be truly Shakespeare-like, they betray that they do not distinguish between matter and form, and that they have not compared the chronicles, which these dramas

follow, with the poetical version. There cannot be much question of plan and composition in a piece which simply follows with few exceptions and errors the course of the chronicle, which like the chronicle unfolds in succession the various layers of the matter, and brings forward a series of scenes, which, as the anecdote of the armourer and the lame Simpcox, stand in but very slight connection with the great course of the whole. Whoever reads the narrations of Hall and Holinshed by the side of Henry VI., whether that of Greene or of Shakespeare, will perceive the most accurate transcript of the text of the narrative even in passages, where he would have least supposed it. The whole insurrection of Cade in the second part, so full of popular humour, rests so entirely in the historical sources, that even the speeches of the rough rebels, which more than anything appeared to be the property of the poet, are found partly verbatim in the chronicle of St. Albans, from which Stowe quotes them in his account of the insurrection of Wat Tyler and Jack Straw. Single highly-poetical passages, the prophecy of Henry VI. concerning Richmond, the bold answer of the captive prince of Wales, the assassination of the young Rutland, and others, are not only borrowed from the chronicle, but the last scene makes in Holinshed also an affecting and poetical impression. When, according to Tieck's expression, the poetical power in these plays increases with the subject, it is because this is the case with the matter of the chronicle also; we need only, in reading the second part, follow the corresponding passages in Holinshed, where after Gloster's assassination the history becomes richer and more attractive, just as the Drama itself. It is the subject that forms the grandeur and attraction of these pieces, and

this even in the plainest historical structure. The drama of this great avalanche of ruin which overwhelms all the powers in the native state, this dissolution of all bonds, this chaos in which misdeed succeeds misdeed, crime rises above crime, and an inexorable Nemesis follows close at the heels of the offending man, all this bears in itself a powerful interest which rather carries away the poet, than that he himself had created it. The picture of the gradual decay of all the powers of the state is an image of pure historical truth and great experience in natural consequences, far more than a delineation of poetic beauties, which influence through harmonious arrangement; but that which invests it with the deep impression upon the mind such as art produces, is the moral or poetic justice, which is not wanting in the drama, and which is nowhere lacking in the grand original work of history of the highest Master, where, as in all periods of revolution, the motives, actions, and fates of men lie exposed to our view. We see foremost in the second part the protector of the kingdom perishing through his own weakness, and his queen through her criminal pride. They fall by the cabals of the nobility, contending among themselves but leagued to the bad purpose, that nobility, who had produced all the evil to the country ever since the days of Richard II. Again, the fall of Suffolk and the rebellion of Cade is quite represented as a retributive judgment upon the aristocracy, as a rising of the suffering lower classes against the oppression, unscrupulousness, and severity of the rule of the nobles. This democracy we see in its turn quickly perish in its own fury and folly: on the ruins again of the aristocracy and the incited people, the tools of his crafty ambition, York raises himself to the dignity of a new

protector, relying upon popular favour and upon his warlike deeds and merits. At the attainment of his efforts he allows himself to be tempted to perjury, and vengeance follows his footsteps; with one of his sons, Rutland, he has a terrible fall. The king himself, who stands in inactive weakness and contemplative devotion, scarcely accountable amidst the ruin of all things, is now tempted by the queen on his side to become a perjurer, and falls into the power and under the sword of his enemies. From the blood of Rutland and of the Prince of Wales springs a new harvest of avenging destinies. Clifford, the murderer of the former, falls; Edward, who was present at the assassination of the prince, totters on his throne; the valiant Warwick, who at last from personal indignation was unfaithful to his old party, perishes. Through all these disasters and retributions, queen Margaret passes unscathed, an embodied apparition of fate, to experience the most refined vengeance of the Nemesis: as a captive raised to the English throne, as "a beggar mounted", she had, according to the adage, "run the horse to death", and surviving to her own torment, she sees all her glory buried; the source of all these sufferings, she is to drink them even to the dregs. Yet this whole catastrophe, we see plainly, is only history, and no poetic plan and composition; this administration of justice itself, which appears so systematic and poetic, is simply taken from the chronicle. In the passage where the prince of Wales (Act X. sc. 5.) is stabbed by Clarence, Gloster, Grey, Dorset, and Hastings, the chronicles of Hall and Holinshed similarly make the emphatic and explicit remark: "for the wicked deed most of the perpetrators in their latter days drank the same cup, in consequence of the deserved justice and the due punish-

ment of God". In this spirit history was and is written in that, as in every, primitive age. This thought has been carried out afterwards by Shakespeare in Richard III. in the fate of those same perpetrators in every single instance, and with an equal emphasis. We might be tempted to suppose, that Shakespeare had learned from this piece and from this history of Henry VI., to satisfy in his art the law of poetic justice; in the continuation of Henry VI., in Richard III., it is almost too glaringly exercised to be called poetically beautiful; in all the later works of Shakespeare this law is obeyed with the greatest scrupulousness, and in many plays with admirable refinement. In any case, this practice in the poet's dramatic art arose from no system of æsthetics, nor from the models of old masters, but purely from the same observation of human nature and human destiny, between which even the simple historiography of old recognizes the close connection, that exhibits man everywhere as the forger of his own fate.

This important historical subject has been sensibly apprehended by Robert Greene, in his two plays (if they are rightly his), though it has been dramatized in a very different treatment, which accommodates itself entirely to the importance of the material and the details in the historical sources: proof sufficient, how little artistic form interfered. And here lies the great difference between this and the Shakespeare histories, that in the latter, when they even follow the chronicle with equal fidelity as Greene's Henry VI., the poet generally appears greatest, just where the chronicle leaves him. In the second part of Greene's Henry VI., there is in the third act a strong and powerful plot; the popular scenes of Cade's insurrection are

full of happy humorous life. In the first act of the third part, the fall of York, a high pathos is preserved, without the usual exaggerations of the older dramatic school; in the words of York and Margaret, Shakespeare could learn the genuine language of great passion, and he found here no inducement to add much of his own. In the second act, where York's sons are aroused, an excellent warlike spirit prevails throughout, and here also has Shakespeare with the most correct feeling restrained his improving hand. But from the third act, and especially in the fourth and fifth, where the history of Henry VI. is almost reflected in miniature in the weak voluptuous Edward and his beggar queen, there begins a series of political scenes with little pathetic emotion; quickly and mechanically these scenes follow each other, without exciting any attractive interest; they are scanty even with Shakespeare, who nevertheless took pains to make something out of the still more scanty, skeleton-like scenes of Greene, to lengthen their contents, and to subdue the strange hurry, with which the first poet pressed on to the end. Still in Shakespeare's elaboration, the reader may observe this scholastic nicety. In the eighth scene of the fourth act, Warwick goes to Coventry, and at the same moment Edward is aware of it, as if they had just met on the stairs; Act V. scene 5., the prince of Wales is murdered, in the succeeding scene the father already knows it. The hurry to the end is so great, that it plainly betrays itself in repeated phrases. The questions; "What now remains?" "And now what rests?" "What then?" are repeated several times in the two last acts. The inequality observable in the dramatization of the historical matter is alike evident in the delineation of the characters. Whatever in the history

struck the poet's mind with its strong delineation, he treated with intelligence and generally with success. Warwick, the darling of the people, "the setter-up and puller-down of kings", the "coal-black haired", the stuttering and noisy favourite and strengthener of the Yorkists, was one of these characters, which was written and acted *con amore*; a most grateful part to those "robustious periwig-pated fellows" whom Hamlet ridiculed. That Cardinal of Winchester, full of ambition and priestly arts, with his "red sparkling eyes" blabbing the malice of his heart, which breaks at last in the pangs of conscience; that defying insolent aristocrat Suffolk, unworthy in prosperity, in danger proudly defiant, and meeting death with the dignity and remembrance of the great men of old, who in similar manner fell by vile hands, — these were the forms of character, in which poets like Greene or Marlowe were a match. York also and the female characters, to which we shall revert, are excellently maintained. The more deeply devised nature of a Humphrey on the contrary, is only sketched for the most part, and the tender saintly figure of Henry VI. was left entirely in the silent back-ground, and first acquired life and soul from Shakespeare. Unequal thus are the characters, unequal is the organization of single parts, unequal is the poetic diction. While single passages are not without great and natural feeling, the pieces on the whole are poor and dry; nowhere so clumsy that Shakespeare could have found much necessary to be rejected, but in very few passages sufficiently full and elaborated for him to have added nothing. As in the personal characteristics, so there occurs in the diction many a strong and successful stroke, but without blending and working up the colours; the poet is not barren in assonance,

and plays skilfully upon words and rhymes; many a proverbial passage of universal truth, many an excellent poetic image, glances forth from versified prose; and it is a peculiarity of these images and similes, that they are taken from the chase, from animals and their properties, that they abound, as it were, in physiological conceits, in which (in the coarse taste of Titus Andronicus) the human organs, lips, mouth, and eyes, are vivified, and frequently exhibited in most revolting functions.

Such were the dramas to which Shakespeare now turned to appropriate them by his own manufacture to his stage. He did so with the reverence of a scholar, this is betrayed in his reluctance to erase; he did so with the skill of future mastery, this is betrayed in the ardent desire for improvement, allowing scarcely a single line to remain intact. Much of the coarseness of the taste of the age, was still left even in his improved work, nay his own additions were sometimes of a similar character. Delight in deeds of horror and blood is not only seen in that lament of Margaret's over Suffolk's head, and in Warwick's description of the corpse of the murdered Humphrey, which Shakespeare found in Greene's text, but in those words also, which proceed from Shakespeare, which Edward directs to Warwick (Act V. sc. 1.):

"This hand, fast wound about thy coal-black hair,
Shall, whiles thy head is warm, and new cut-off,
Write in the dust this sentence with thy blood," &c.

Much of that hyperbolic poetry of the Italian style, to which Shakespeare does homage in his narratives, is also to be found here; the greater part of which consists in description, in the accumulation of artificial epithets, and in false affectation of

the ancients in mythological images and learned quotations. The bombast in those passages where he speaks of tearful eyes adding water to the sea, and of the lion's "devouring paws", has been often censured; the far-fetched exaggerated expressions of the passion of queen Margaret (Act II. sc. 1.) remind us perfectly of the style of Lucrece. But in general, the natural, simply historical material has extricated the poet from this unnatural and artificial mode of diction. His inclination to unusual and choice language, the abundance of metaphor, the soaring of his poetic fancy, has never on the whole led him to extravagance of style, but served only to give flesh and blood to the dry skeleton of his predecessors. The natural train of thought, the richness of feeling, the order in which passion is developed and its expressions excited, all in which the true power of the poet is revealed, places him, if we compare the two texts, in the rank of a master at the side of Greene. If we read the original at almost any exciting passage, we shall find it, if not bad and faulty, almost throughout poor and defective; that which we instinctively miss and want, the true poet brings from the depths of the soul, and adds it with unique tact and natural feeling. It is a firm stem, around which he clings, but which only through the influence of his warm poetical embrace shoots forth in leaves and blossoms. He who can compare the originals of Greene with Shakespeare, should read in the second part the scene between Gloster and his wife (Act II. sc. 4.) and see, how desultorily in the one the thoughts suddenly and unnaturally change in the words of the Duchess, while in the other Shakespeare has filled up the gaps with the links required. He should read in the plot for the overthrow of Humphrey (II. 3. 1.), how the

queen breaks in with the council awkwardly and unexpectedly, while on the other hand Shakespeare smoothes and prepares the way for her accusations. After Humphrey is murdered (III. 2.), the queen only deliberates coldly: I stood badly with Gloster, they will believe, I killed him. But Shakespeare makes her unfold the arts of female dissimulation, and whilst she conceals the agitation of her breast by self-lamentation, what resources he bestows upon her of falsehood, deception, and hypocrisy! He should follow the poet from thence especially to the soliloquies of the crafty York. In his first monologue (in the old play) with cold calculation he states his political plans; he relates, dryly as the chronicle, the actual state of things; there is no emotion of feeling, no lively picture of the situation. This Shakespeare animated with poetic ornament, with traits of character, with richness of language, with descriptive detail; we do not only learn that York has seduced the popular leader Cade "to make commotion", but also who Cade is, and why he is thought fit for this bold part. Just so in another soliloquy in Greene, York clings to the simple account of facts and the consideration suggested by them: I require troops, you give me them, I shall use them. But that which Shakespeare adds, is just the lacking feeling and passion: the promptings of a mind deeply agitated by ambition, the restless activity of a brain through which the aspiring thoughts chase each other, each dreaming of dignity; this is the picture of the man as he stands alone, conversing with himself, and not the cold enumeration of deeds which lie in the future, the motives to which alone belong to this his solitary present. In the one we receive the impression of the icy calculator sketching out his ambitious views as systematic-

ally as he planned his deeds, whilst in the other, the moving power of his soul, mastering himself, is at work, brooding over the hindrances and promotions of his projects, and lightly sketching the actions, to which it spurs and incites the energy and will.

From what we have said, it is evident, that it is especially in the development of character, that Shakespeare's talent strikes us in this comparison of the two works. Several of the characters of the play afforded him little interest; it is worthy of observation, and points out Shakespeare's natural inclination to shun all trivialities, that foremost among these personages, indifferent to him, stands that grateful heroic part of Warwick. This character, the same popular hero and darling, the same warrior stammering with impetuosity, vainglorious in his self-reliance, was afterwards depicted by Shakespeare in Percy, and this illustrious counterpart the panegyrists of the plays of Henry VI. must compare with him, if they would accurately determine their relation to the works of the matured poet. The Cardinal of Winchester and the Duke of Suffolk were finished by Shakespeare according to the outline designed, without great sympathy with these characters, but not without certain masterly touches, which would have betrayed his hand if we did not know him as the elaborator: in the passage where in the old piece Suffolk asks the murderers of Humphrey, whether they have despatched him, Shakespeare characterizes the man by the cutting heartless question: "Now, sirs, have you despatch'd *this thing*?" The excellent contrast of the two masculine women, Eleanor and Margaret, Shakespeare found before him; Greene had worked at both these characters with the greatest success and industry;

the jealousy and hatred between the rich, proud, ambitious, duchess of unconquerable mind, and the upstart portionless woman of fierce malicious nature, is excellently traced. The vindictive, furious, unrestrained character of the queen, whose face, "visor-like, unchanging" expresses the numbness of her nature, is depicted, in glaring, but striking touches, in the scene of York's death, where, in cruel wantonness she trifles as the cat with the mouse; to atone in some degree for this flinty heart, Greene has imputed to her a true, perhaps too tender, feeling for Suffolk, the origin of her doubtful good fortune. Shakespeare has here added but little, still that little is perfectly in the spirit of the plot. Let us only compare attentively in the scene of the farewell between Eleanor and her husband that interwoven trait: how after her fall, the most fearful thing to the ambitious woman is that "the giddy multitude do point" at her, and how her unbridled worldly ambition is suddenly changed into a longing for death. Characters of finer mould, which demanded Shakespeare's finer nature, are Gloster and the king. Duke Humphrey of Gloster, who appears in the second part quite different to the Gloster of the first, is invested with the great qualities of consummate mildness and benevolence, with a Solomon-like wisdom, with freedom from all ambition, severe Brutus-like justice towards every one, even towards his wife, whose last dishonour he notwithstanding shares in as a private character. The greatness of his self-command, which is contrasted with the unbridled passion of his wife, Shakespeare has rendered prominent by one of his happy touches. In the passionate scene (II. Act I. sc. 3.), preparatory to his own fall and that of his Duchess, he goes out and returns without reason; Shakespeare explains this

as an intentional movement, with which the loyal man endeavoured to suppress his excitement and choler. There is too much noble and quiet grandeur in Humphrey, for us not to be wounded by his fall, which appears merely as a realization of the fable of the lamb, that had troubled the wolf's water. It is Shakespeare's addition, that he intertwined the garland of his virtues with that foolish reliance upon his innocence, which leads him to destruction, which leaves him careless amid the persecutions of his enemies, although he knew, that York's "overweening arm was reaching at the moon"; at the moment of his fall, he too late becomes acute, and predicts his own ruin and that of his king. That weakness is a crime, is indicated by Shakespeare in this character and more closely worked out in Henry VI. This figure indeed was entirely formed by him; Greene placed the king as a cypher silently into the background, but Shakespeare drew him forth, and delineated his nothingness. A saint, "whose bookish rule had pulled fair England down", formed rather for a pope than a king, more fit for heaven than earth, a king, as Shakespeare adds, who longed and wished to be a subject more than any subject longed to be a king, he is in his inaction the source of all the misdeeds, which disorder the kingdom. Weakness makes robbers bold; in these words the weakness of the king is condemned, and Shakespeare exhibits this distinctly in his relations to the individuals or to the whole state of the country. He defends (all this is Shakespeare's addition) the persecuted Protector (II. Act III. sc. 1.), with eloquence, and afterwards suffers him to fall: this distinctly places his impotence in relief. When Humphrey is arrested, the older piece places in the king's mouth two

barren lines, while Shakespeare in fuller language displays in a masterly manner the picture of weakness, the powerless man comparing himself to the dam who can do nought but low after her calf, which the butcher bears to the slaughter-house. When afterwards (Act III. sc. 2.) they go to look after the murdered duke, the older piece has again only two bald lines for Henry, while Shakespeare puts into his mouth an agitated prayer, and in this prepares that state of mind, in which the king, supported by the valiant Warwick, is afterwards induced to an act of severity against Suffolk. As here the pious king leaves unperformed, with respect to his beloved protector, the commonest acts of gratitude and attachment, so the saint forgets, with respect to his kingdom, the most sacred duties: from weakness he becomes a perjurer, from weakness he disinherits his son, performing in that act what even "unreasonable creatures" do not with their young; after he has persuaded himself that he is to expiate the sins of the House of Lancaster, he exposes himself with fatalistic equanimity to blind destiny, and whilst the civil war rages (in a soliloquy entirely inserted by Shakespeare, III. Act II. sc. 5.), he wishes himself a "homely swain" in the repose of contemplation and in the simple discharge of duty. Those abstract pictures of the civil war, where the son has slain the father, the father the son, the scenes which so powerfully touched our own Schiller, the older piece possesses in scanty outline, but Shakespeare by his touch first gave expression to them, and by uniting them with that idyllic soliloquy of the king, first gave them their depth; because in that place they remind the king of the higher duties of his position, which he had forgotten in his selfish desire for repose.

If we may call this king Henry VI., Shakespeare's own creation, he found, on the contrary, Richard of Gloster wholly prepared in the third part. The aspiring spirit inherited from his father, the glance of the eagle at the sun, the complete ambition, the indifference to the means for an object, the valour, the superstition, which represent in him the voice of conscience, the subtle art of dissimulation, the histrionic talent of a "Roscius", the faithless policy of a Cataline, these had been already assigned to him by Greene in this piece. But how excellent even here have been Shakespeare's after-touches, we see in the soliloquy (III. Act III. sc. 2.), where the ambitious projects of the duke hold counsel as to his means of realizing them; it is the counterpart to the similar soliloquy of his father York (II. Act III. sc. 1.), and permits us to anticipate how far the son will surpass the father. The principal figure of the two pieces, Richard of York, is almost throughout so delineated, as if the nature of his more fearful son was prefigured in him. Far-fetched policy, the cunning and dissimulation of a prudent, determined man, blend in him, not in degree, but in kind, in the same apparent contradiction as in Richard, with firmness, with unfitness for flattery, with inability to cringe, with bitter and genuine discontent. With the same assurance and superiority as Richard the son, he is at one time ready to decide at the point of the sword, and at another, to shuffle the cards silently and wait "till time do serve"; by the same aspirations and ambitions both alike are animated. Endowed with the same favours of nature as his father, Richard would have developed the same good qualities, which the father possessed in addition to his dangerous gifts. Ugly, misshapen, and despised, without a right to the throne and

without a near prospect of the satisfaction of his royal projects, his devouring ambition was poisoned; in his father, called the flower of the chivalry of Europe, convinced of his rights, and proud of his merits, the aspiring disposition is moderated into a more legitimate form. At the death of his son Rutland, his better nature bursts forth forcibly to light. He is honest enough, upon the pretended disgrace of his enemy Somerset, to dismiss his powers, and to give his sons as pledges; he is moderate enough, and appears ready, had he not been led away by his sons, to suspend his claims to the throne until Henry's death, whom, in the course of nature, he was not likely to survive; he laboured for his House, and not as his son, for himself. His claims and those of his House, which he asserts in opposition to the helpless and inactive Henry, he grounds not upon the malicious consciousness of personal superiority, as his son Richard does subsequently, but upon a good right, upon his favour with the people, upon his services in France and Ireland. Contrasted with Henry, he feels himself more kingly in birth, nature, and disposition. When he exercises his retaliation on the Lancasters, he utters those words according to which Bolingbroke had before more cunningly acted towards Richard II.: he who cannot rule should obey. This contrast of York to Henry VI. is the soul of both pieces. The thought, how the claims of the hereditary right of an incapable king, who is ruining the country, stand in relation to the claims of the personal merit, which saves the country from destruction, this thought proceeds involuntarily from the history of the rule of Henry VI.; the poet of the older pieces has uncertainly seized it; Shake-

speare has understood it better and carried it out. In the elaboration of these two pieces this is not strikingly apparent. Shakespeare has here too mechanically and timidly followed the arrangement of the whole; even here we must say, the drama following the history creates this thought, far more than that the thought, penetrating the drama, should have animated and, as it were, created it. But this is the case in the counterpart to Henry VI., which Shakespeare subsequently produced in the most masterly manner: in the elevation of the house of Lancaster, in Richard II., Henry IV. and V. We shall there find, how Shakespeare made the matter subservient to the idea; here the material is entirely predominant and controlling; and in this contrast, the value of Henry VI., compared to the later works of our poet, is fully denoted.

Every one has perceived that Shakespeare is more himself in Henry IV. than in Henry VI.; in the comparison of his elaboration of the two last parts of this history we must, however, just as decidedly confess, that here is something more than Marlowe and Greene. In Shakespeare's first attempts to appropriate foreign works to his stage, this was at once perceived by his contemporaries, who cast jealous glances upon the new rival. Two interesting notices upon this, the one uncertain, the other all the more certain, have been handed down to us from the early years of his activity in London. In a letter from Thomas Nash to the students of both universities (prefixed to Greene's *Menaphon* 1589) there is the following passage: "It is a common practice now a daies amongst a sort of shifting companions, that runne through every arte and thrive by none, to leave the

trade of Noverint* whereto they were borne, and busie themselves with the indevours of art, that could scarcely latinize their necke-verse if they should have neede; yet English Seneca read by candle-light yeeldes manie good sentences, as *Blould is a begger*, and so foorth: and if you intreate him faire in a frostie morning, he will affoord you whole *Hamlets*, I should say Handfulls of tragical speaches." If it could be proved, that an early elaboration of Hamlet by Shakespeare existed at that time, there would be no doubt, that these sarcasms were intended specially to hit him, and that Nash knew or believed him to have run through the attorney's office. *Probable* it always remains, since Nash was one of those intimate friends of Robert Greene, who was equally irritated against Shakespeare's improving and masterly hand, to which the second more certain notice relates. Greene, whom from the following communications we consider to be the first author of the two last parts of Henry VI., died in the year 1592, before which time not only his work on these pieces, but Shakespeare's revision of it, must have appeared. The poet left a letter behind him, which his friend Chettle publishes in 1592 according to Greene's own wish, under the title: "A Groats-worth of Wit, bought with a million of Repentance", and which was addressed to their mutual dramatic friends, Marlowe, Lodge, and Peele. The dying friend repentingly admonishes them to break off all connection with the stage, and this in the following words: "Base-minded men all three of you, if by my misery ye be not warned; for unto

* The commencement of all contracts and legal documents: *Noverint universi* &c.

none of you, like me, sought those burs to cleave; those puppets, I mean, that speak from our mouths, those anticks garnished in our colours. Is it not strange that I, to whom they have all been beholding; is it not like that you, to whom they have all been beholding, shall (were ye in that case that I am now) be both of them at once forsaken? Yes, trust them not! for there is an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his "*Tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide*", supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank-verse, as the best of you: and, being an absolute *Johannes Factotum*, is, in his own conceit, the only Shake-scene in a country. O! that I might entreat your rare wits to be employed in more profitable courses, and let these apes imitate your past excellence, and never more acquaint them with your admired inventions." The passage alludes, with a significant play upon the name, to our Shakespeare; it speaks of him as an upstart, as a *Johannes Factotum*, which he might have been to the Blackfriars company, being their only poet. The passage says of him, that he was beautified with "our feathers", a proof that these pieces are composed by all, or by some or one of these poets; for that an appropriation and revision of these pieces are meant, appears from the parodied line, "O tiger's heart wrapp'd in a woman's hide", taken from the third part of Henry VI. Shakespeare, it appears, complained of this attack. Chettle, the editor of Greene's tract, made an apology, it seems as far as Shakespeare was concerned, in a tract, entitled "Kind-heart's Dream". It says there among other things, that one or two play-makers had taken Greene's letter "offensively". With none of them was he acquainted; with one of them he cared not if he ever was;

the other, he had not spared at the time, as since he wished he had. For he had himself seen, that his demeanour was no less civil, than he was excellent in the quality he professed. Besides, he adds, "divers of worship have reported his uprightness of dealing, which argues his honesty, and his facetious grace in writing, that approves his art." Thus have we here the first testimony, which concedes to Shakespeare equal honour in his new career, as a poet, an actor, and a man.

THE COMEDY OF ERRORS AND THE TAMING OF THE SHREW.

If we may venture to number the Comedy of Errors and the Taming of the Shrew among the works of Shakespeare's early period, in which he appears dependent upon foreign originals, we see how the young poet, without one-sided preference, equally tried his skill in happy variety, upon all styles and subjects. He had worked at an heroic tragedy in Titus, at a romantic drama in Pericles, at a history in Henry VI.; in the Comedy of Errors he adopted a comedy of intrigue; and in the Taming of the Shrew, a comedy in which plot and character equally engaged his attention. That the Taming of the Shrew really belongs to this earliest period, internal evidence alone has hitherto declared; but the Comedy of Errors, from an allusion in the piece, was written at the time of the French civil wars against Henry IV., (1589—93) probably soon after 1591, when Essex was sent to the assistance of Henry IV., and it thus indisputably belongs to this early period.

The Comedy of Errors (a designation, which according

to the proof in Halliwell's splendid edition, became subsequently proverbial,) was, as is known, taken from the *Menæchmi* of Plautus, which Shakespeare could have read in an English translation, probably by Warner, a book which however appears to have been written later than Shakespeare's piece, and was printed in 1595, and beyond the ground-work of the subject, had in language and execution no sort of similarity with Shakespeare's play. We know that a "historic of Errors" had been acted at the English Court about the year 1577 and later; possibly, this was a remodelling of the *Menæchmi* of Plautus, which Shakespeare appropriated to himself and his stage. How far the way for our poet may have been prepared by this precursor, we cannot of course say. But compared to Plautus, his piece is superior both in form and matter; with him it is little more than a farce. Coleridge has even so called Shakespeare's play; but it appears to us, with by no means the same justice. We shall guard ourselves from imputing too profound a philosophy to a comedy, the subject of which rests on a series of laughable accidents, that we may not build too massive a structure of explanation upon too light a basis of poetry. Nevertheless in the *Comedy of Errors*, that feature of Shakespearian profoundness, with which he knew how to obtain a great inner significance from the most superficial material of traditions, seems to lie before us in one early example, in which the fine spiritual application which the poet has extracted from the material, strikes us as all the more remarkable, the more coarse and bold the out-work of the plot has been handled. The errors and mistakes, which arise from the resemblance of the two pairs of twins, are carried still farther and are more improbably the work

of accident, in Shakespeare than in Plautus. With the latter, there is only one pair of brothers, one of which does not even know that they bear the same name, and neither knows that they are similar; thus the errors are more simple and possible. According to Shakespeare's design on the contrary, the father must have told one child of the similarity which he bore to his brother at his birth. From this it need not certainly follow, that this same similarity should have been preserved in mature years; but the sameness of name must ever have been prominently before the searching Syracusan; that the people at Ephesus know him and call him by name, must have startled and struck him all the more, as his recognition in Ephesus is combined with peril of life. To avoid the improbabilities found in the sources from which he drew, is everywhere else an effort, which characterizes most strictly Shakespeare's knowledge of human nature; here, in the plot of the play, there is hardly a trace of this effort to be found. There is only the scene of action, Ephesus, represented at the very beginning as the corrupted seat of all jugglers and conjurors, mountebanks and cheaters, and the good Syracusan Antipholus appears driven by the course of the intricacies, which increase in masterly manner until the catastrophe, to such straits that he rather considers himself bewitched, than that he arrives at the simple conjecture, to which the very object of his journey must again and again have led him.

But what is missing of skilful management in respect to this plot, scarcely weighs in the balance, when we see, how the poet has given to the whole extravagant matter of these mistakes and intricacies, an inner relation to the character of the family in which he has placed them. These comic

parts appear upon a thoroughly tragic back-ground, which indeed interferes not at all with the extravagant scenes in the fore-ground, perhaps only makes them the more conspicuous, but yet every moment appears with sufficient importance to keep under the superficial and weak impression of a mere farce, of which the kernel as well as the shell consisted in the mistakes of those similar twins. The hostilities between Syracuse and Ephesus form the farthest chiaroscuro back-ground, upon which the whole picture is drawn, the comic parts of which can scarcely be considered more fascinating and exciting, than the tragic. The fate of the imprisoned father who seeks his lost sons, who, engaged on a work of love, is condemned to death, whose inner sufferings at last increase to the degree, that he sees himself unknown by his recovered son and believes himself disowned by him, this raises the piece far above the character of a mere farce. This tragic part is united with the comic by the tenderest relations, — relations which the poet has interwoven into the received story, according to his later habit, with that totality of his spiritual nature, that one absolutely remains in doubt, whether he acted rather from blind instinct or with perfect consciousness. We look upon a double family, and its earlier and present destinies, in which the most peculiar errors take place, not merely of an external, but of an internal character. In this family lie together the strange contrasts of domestic love and a roving spirit; these produce alternate happiness and misfortune, and occasion troubles and quarrels, in spite of inner congeniality of soul and family attachment, and estrangement and perplexity in spite of outward similarity. The old Ægeon relates, in the excellent exposition of the piece, the history of the double

birth of the two twins. Before their birth he had left his wife on a visit to Epidamnum; his wife, expecting to become a mother, hastened from Syracuse to join him. The inducement to this journey, the poet has left as a matter of conjecture; only so far has he indicated, that if a loving, it was also a wilful step, and besides it is evident in itself, that the step combined at once those contrasting qualities of family affection and love of wandering. Was it the result of suspicion and jealousy, of that quality, which in itself of so contrary a nature, disturbs love, and yet has its source in love alone? We should think so; for this Æmilia can subsequently preach to her daughter-in-law with such forcible warning against this passion. Her twins are born at Epidamnum, and "not meanly proud of two such boys", she made, against the will of her husband "daily motions for the home return"; during the journey that shipwreck befalls them, which separates husband and wife, mother and father, and with each a pair of the twins, their own sons and their foster-brothers and future attendants. The Syracusan family, the father and one son, feel again after the lapse of many years the workings of the same family character; the son travels for seven years, in quest of his lost mother and brother, although he perceives the folly of seeking a drop in the ocean; the same love, sacrifice, and folly draws the father again after the son; a lively impulse works in them, as in the mother before, to unite the family, and this very impulse separates them ever more, and threatens at length to separate them forcibly and for ever. In the family at Ephesus, between the lost Antipholus with his mother and his wife Adriana, there is another error, the trace of which is to be found already in Plautus' *Menæchmi*. The wife is a

shrew from jealousy; she torments her innocent husband, and robs herself wantonly of his love; her passion leads her to self-forgetfulness and a sacrifice of all that is feminine. And this moral error justly occasions physical errors between the two brothers, until at last at the same time by means of the retired and experienced mother Æmilia, the internal dissension is healed and the errors are cleared up, both with equal satisfaction. The reader feels indeed, how beautifully through these finely veiled, deeper relations themselves, the eventful comic parts of the play are invested with too high a value, for the piece ever to bear the impression of a mere farce.

It is not impossible, that upon the point of the discord in this family from jealousy and the quarrelsome nature of the women, not only an æsthetic but in consequence of personal sympathy, a pathological stress was laid by the poet. We say this merely as a conjecture, upon which we would not place much value; it is also very possible, that what strikes us from its unusual concurrence, is mere accident. We have before intimated that just in Shakespeare's early youthful writings the impressions gathered from his own domestic circumstances, which he brought with him to London, seem to glance forth. In *Henry VI.* he has drawn the characters of the two masculine women, Margaret and Eleanor, more acutely and with more expressive touches, than his predecessor; and how eloquently he makes Suffolk at the close of the first part, in a scene which we conjectured to be his writing, declaim against unloving marriages:

"For what is wedlock forced but a hell,
An age of discord and continual strife?
Whereas the contrary bringeth forth bliss
And is a pattern of celestial peace".

Here in the *Comedy of Errors*, he awakens the conscience of the jealous shrew Adriana, when Æmilia lays upon her the blame of the believed madness of her husband, by her "venom clamours" and railing, with which she hindered his sleeps and sauced his meat, and gave him over to "moody and dull melancholy." In contrast to her he has placed her mild sister, who "ere she learns love, will practise to obey", who draws a lesson from examples in the kingdom of nature, that the woman is justly subject to the man, who amid care and trouble procures the maintenance of life. In the *Taming of the Shrew*, a piece that stands in complete affinity, both of outline and idea, with the *Comedy of Errors*, Shakespeare describes how the shrew is to be educated on the threshold of marriage, and how she is brought by just discipline to the temper of mind, which is natural to the mild Luciana. Her speech at the close of the piece expresses in sharp touches the relation of a wife to her husband, as Shakespeare regarded it. This is quite conformable to the sentiments of that day; to our perverted feelings, it is an exaggerated picture; to the affected homage of the present day to the female sex, it will appear barbarity or irony. What might seem in this speech of Katharine too energetic and strong, is to be explained by her spirit of contradiction, and the poet in writing it, may have been spurred by his own bitter experience. It is certainly striking that Shakespeare has never again depicted this sort of unfeminine character in its conjugal relations; it is, as if he would disburden himself of his impressions in these pieces, as he next exhausted his vein of love in a series of erotic plays. Thus it were certainly possible, that these early productions grew out of these passages in the poet's personal existence,

that they, just as Goethe's "Mitschuldige" with its repulsive contents, rested on the inner experiences of his own life.

The Taming of the Shrew bears a striking resemblance to the Comedy of Errors, especially in the parts, which do not concern the circumstances of Petruchio and Katharine. The latin school, the manner in which the Italians of the 16th century, Ariosto and Machiavelli, revived the comedies of Plautus, was justly perceived by Schlegel in this part of the piece. This is simply explained by the fact, that Shakespeare in this very part borrowed essential touches from the "Suppositi" of Ariosto, which in 1566 were translated into English by Gascoigne. Like the figure of Pinch in the Errors, those of the Pedant and the Pantaloon Gremio, are pure characters of the Italian comedy, and the whole plot of the piece is perfectly carried out in the taste of this school. As in the Comedy of Errors, the long doggrel verse and the language of the old pre-Shakespeare comedy are pre-eminent here, as is the case only a few times besides in his earliest original comedies, the Two Gentlemen of Verona, Love's Labour's Lost, and others, and never happens again in the pieces of Shakespeare's riper period. As in the Comedy of Errors, the diction is unequal, the dialogue often clumsy; there are single passages on the other hand equal in good taste, and in cleverness of verse and language, to the matured style of the poet. As in that comedy, there is little regard paid to the probability of the story and its circumstances. As in the one, the Ephesian Dromio, so in the other, the little Grumio is the coarser form of a clown, such as Shakespeare in his early comedies alone loves to introduce and to work out. As in the Errors, so here in the part which turns upon Lucentio's wooing of Bianca, the art of depicting character

is imperfectly exhibited: the rich old wooer Gremio, the "narrow prying father" Minola, are the superficial characters belonging to comedies of mere plot; and so too in the Errors there is only a common distinction of character drawn between the violent Ephesian Antipholus, who usually beats his stupid servant, and the milder Syracusan, with whom his witty attendant stands more on the footing of a jester. In both pieces, it is striking how the poet lingers among his school reminiscences; no other undisputed play of Shakespeare's furnishes so much evidence of his learning and study as the Taming of the Shrew. In the address of the Syracusan Antipholus to Luciana (Act III. sc. 2.), in which he calls her a mermaid, and asks her, "are you a god", there is a purely Homeric tone; the same passage, bearing the same stamp, is met with again in the Taming of the Shrew, (Act IV. sc. 5.) where Katharine, when she addresses Vincentio, uses a similar passage from Ovid, borrowed by him from Homer, and in which the antique sound lingers even under the touch of a fourth hand. This pervading mannerism of his youthful writings ought long ago to have determined the position of this piece among those of the earliest period of the poet. All critics have felt this: Malone, Delius, and even Collier, who thought that several hands had been engaged on the piece. It is indubitable, that the poet's own hand was more than once employed upon it. In the form in which we now read the piece, it must have been later embellished, as we assume with certainty of other plays. Very significant allusions point to later pieces of contemporary poets, the introduction refers to Fletcher's "Women Pleased", a piece not written before 1604. That the name Baptista in the Taming of the Shrew is rightly used as that

of a man, and in Hamlet on the contrary as that of a woman, is a proof to Collier, that the comedy was written later than Hamlet in 1601. But whoever considers the refinement with which Shakespeare at this very time, in *Much Ado about Nothing* repeated, as it were, in a higher sphere the two characters of Petruchio and Katharine, will never believe, that the same poet at the same time could have originally written this piece.

The principal figure of our comedy (the shrew) belonged to the favourite subjects of a joyous and laughter-loving age; poems and jests related of shrewish women; in one farce, Tom Tiler and his wife, the sufferings of an oppressed husband were performed by children, as early as 1569; in Chettle's *Griseldis*, the episode of the welsh knight and the shrew whom he marries, forms the counterpart to the patient and mild heroine of the piece. There exists "the *Taming of a Shrew*", written by an unknown hand, the piece upon which Shakespeare grounded his own play. The older piece was printed in 1594, when it had already been several times performed; this does not prevent its being older by some time. It was published in a well-known collection by Steevens (*Six Old Plays*). The plot of the piece is much coarser than with Shakespeare; even where the scene is preserved, it is far more clumsy in the original. The scenes of a humorous kind, like those between Katharine and Grumio, and with the haberdasher and tailor, were for the most part arranged, as they have since remained. The contrast between the bombastic pathos of the scenes between the lovers, and the general disgusting nature of the burlesque parts is so great, that we may here again perceive, how the poet even in his coarser productions has refined every-

thing; there are here single expressions, for which Shakespeare's pen, however indelicate it may appear to our generation, was at all times too chaste. The comparison of the two pieces does not exhibit the relation between them like that of Shakespeare's *Henry VI.* to Greene's, but the poet, by the pervading improvement of material and form, has made the work his own.

We have intimated already, that the *Taming of the Shrew* consists of two contrary parts. The story of the accomplished Lucentio, who, full of students' tricks, comes to Padua at least perhaps for the sake of learning, accompanied by a clever servant, who is able to change parts with his master, his shy and skilful wooing of the well-bred Bianca, who is versed in all fine arts, forms a plot of refined design after the Italian taste. The counterpart to this, the wooing of the coarse Petruchio and the quarrelsome Katharine is a piece of genuine popular character. With this latter part, the central point of the play, we shall alone occupy ourselves, in order to see, how the poet passes from the shallow delineation of persons, to which we are accustomed in plays of intrigue, to the more profound development of character, with which at a later period he has indulged us throughout his works.

The scenes between Petruchio and Katharine might be converted into a mere joke, and that of the commonest order. It is sad to think that a man like Garrick has done this. He has contracted the piece under the title of *Katharine and Petruchio* into a play of three acts, he has expunged the more refined part, the plot for the wooing of Bianca, and he has debased the coarse remainder into a clumsy caricature. The acting of the pair was coarsely

extravagant, according to the custom, which has subsequently maintained its ground; Woodward acted at that time Petruchio with such fury, that he ran the fork into the finger of his fellow actress (Mrs. Clive), and when he carried her off the stage, threw her down. Thus is the piece still performed in London as a concluding farce, with all disgusting overloadings of vulgar buffoonery, even after that in 1844, the genuine play was again acted at the Haymarket, and was received with applause.

If all England were to support Garrick, we should confidently maintain, that our comedy was not so intended by the poet. The piece is, it is true, treated in a wood-cut style; the subject, if it were not to fall into pedantic moralizing, could bear no other handling. Even in common intercourse the questions upon the subordination and rule of the wife are even brought forward in exaggerated jest; coarse humour must give the subject its colouring. The delicate texture of a higher nature belongs not to the two leading characters; it must be so, for had they been differently constituted, the circumstance could not have taken place. The wooer, Petruchio, is fashioned out of coarse clay; he comes not to Padua as Lucentio does for the sake of study, but to marry for gold. The rich shrew is offered to him, in jest, and he enters upon his courtship in a spirit of good humoured bravado; this even his Grumio penetrates. He has never been of refined nature and habits; he goes badly dressed; to strike his servants and wring them by the ears on the smallest cause, is common with him; but at the same time he has travelled and is experienced, he has learned to know men and how to handle them. To tame the shrew cannot frighten him who is conscious of understanding with

manly power, the play of jest and flattering gallantry, and in extremest cases knows that the

"Little fire grows great with little wind,
Yet extreme gusts will blow out fire and all".

He is a soldier, huntsman, and sailor, sufficient of each to develop a rugged character, he is a rigid disciplinarian, unapproachable and imposing. He is compared by Katharine to a crab-apple, and I know not what could be more expressively likened to the hard-skinned muscular faces of soldiers long in service.

Katharine, whom he undertakes to woo, is like a wasp, like a foal that kicks from its halter, pert, quick, and determined, but full of good heart, in whose nature Petruchio already takes pleasure, because in the right place, as in the last act with the widow, her honest heart overflows. She is spoilt by the father, an ill-behaved child, who cannot crave nor thank, who mistreats her gentler sister, binds her, and beats her. She is excited to the highest pitch of violence by her father's preference for her sister, but principally from envy of the numerous suitors, who press round Bianca, whilst she has the prospect of remaining unmarried. To those beautiful feminine souls, who remain unembittered with this prospect and in this lot, and who do not lose the especial harmony of the female nature, she does not belong. The key rather to her character and to her conduct to the ill-mannered suitor, is that she is embittered against her threatening lot, to "lead apes in hell"; a proverbial humorous expression for the fate of the unmarried, which Beatrice also uses of herself in *Much Ado about Nothing*. She wishes for a husband, he wishes for gold, thus

the way is smoothed to each of them. The old piece, that Shakespeare had before him, says plainly, she wished for a husband, and that is the source of her contention; and Petruchio knows it also, expresses it, and founds upon it his boldness. But to express such trivialities, was not Shakespeare's method; he did not make it so easy for his actors; he committed to their ability to bring into their acting that which was understood of itself. In the wooing scene, all Katharine's words are repulsive and contemptuous; she does not assent, and yet they are afterwards betrothed. This passage has perplexed all actors; it has always been esteemed strange and imperfect; its performance in Garrick's version is quite detestable. But for two clever actors all is given in this scene, which the characters demand. He inundates her with words, flatteries, which she has never before heard; when he compares her with Diana, she returns her first calm and quiet answer. The habitual spirit of contradiction makes her coarse and repelling even towards him and his roughness, but as soon as she sees that he is serious, the storm must subside with her. The actress, who conceives this character in a naive manner, will at once have gained her point; it *must* be conceived in a naive manner, not as a shrew by profession, but as a passionate child, who has never laid aside the waywardness of her early years. She must not once for all storm over her part; before the new phenomenon of a suitor; she should rather stand in droll confusion; she ought not to make grimaces at the wooer, but to exhibit to him an open countenance, agitated by curiosity and surprise, to look at him with a clear eye, that is not confiding, and yet would willingly confide, that scorns and, in the midst of scorn, relaxes. To

this naiveté there is full scope given by the poet. Whilst Petruchio overwhelms Katharine with his flatteries, he interweaves all that the bad world says of her; he exaggerates it and affects that she limps; involuntarily she will now step firmly forward, in order to convince him of the contrary; upon this he is sarcastic, and immediately she pauses in the spirit of contradiction and confusion. As soon as witnesses come, he affects that she hung about his neck and gave "kiss on kiss" —; when the actress of Katharine, as is usually the case, resents this, and shows herself unmannerly about it, it is indeed not to be understood, how then the betrothal can pass for settled. Whilst he says the decisive words: — "kiss me, Kate, we will be *married o' Sunday*", he probably uses the refrain of an old familiar song, which humorously softens the assurance lying in this authoritative wooing. Her answer is that she will see him hanged first, and this can only be said in perfect calmness after the subsided storm, can only be spoken half inquiringly, half sulkily, at once conquered and resisting. She then goes off the stage at the same time with him, without having assented; but she has silently, although contradictorily agreed. This is the poet's design. She could not indeed answer with a Yes, for she had practised so long only the No of contradiction. Beatrice in *Much Ado about Nothing*, a much more delicately designed character, can do so just as little; this lies naturally in these characters, who are most deeply averse even to the appearance of sentimentality. The suitor facilitates the path in a delicate manner, witnessing to his psychological superiority; he interweaves adroitly that "'tis bargained 'twixt them twain", that she for a time might continue to play her shrewish part. He seizes her then on another weak side;

he goes to Venice "to buy apparel 'gainst the wedding day"; she shall be fine at the marriage; she shows indeed on other occasions, that she is woman enough to care for this. And what the short time of his absence effects and changes in her, she betrays afterwards at his delay with that one sigh: "Would Katharine had never seen him!" — which is uttered only with lingering passion, tenderly, and amid tears, when the father himself expects an outburst of her "impatient humour". All this, it seems, is very skilful and will be acted skilfully. The matter, and the actor must certainly distinguish between them, the matter is coarse, but the structure is full of delicacy; the task of representing coarseness, is to be discharged in a delicate manner.

For the actress of Katharine, the wooing scene is the difficult point; for the actor of Petruchio, the course of the Taming. The latter might appear wholly as an exaggerated caricature: but he who is capable of giving it the right humour, will give this extravagance something of the modesty of nature. In Garrick's farce, when Petruchio comes in extravagant pomp, celebrates an extravagant wedding, departs in extravagant haste, all fellow-actors are amazed and frightened. But this is not Shakespeare's design; Grumio finds the whole so droll that he could "die with laughing". The manner in which he tames her, however coarse it may appear, is characterized by the same good method as his wooing. By his departure for Venice, his long absence, his strange appearance, he begins with her a moral discipline, which works by expectation, suspense, and disappointment. Then follows the physical discipline, in order to subdue her rebellious temper. As he obtained her by stratagem, silenced her by vehemence, so he tames her first by overstraining,

and then by restraining her mental and physical nature. The latter part of the cure is the very method, by which falcons are trained through hunger and watching. But all the privations which he demands from her, he shares with her; he deprives her of sleep and eating under the pretext of love and care for her. If this is performed, as is often the case, in a thoroughly brutal manner, the poet's intention is defeated, for he designed to leave Katharine no cause for resenting the behaviour she met with. That passage might be opposed to us, in which Petruchio requires his betrothed, to declare the sun to be the moon, but in this passage we may recognize only a skilful test; here the severe discipline evidently passes off in a humorous jest, and a good actor thus perceives the passage. In England it is perhaps an old tradition, that immediately after this passage, where she has yielded, when she is now fully cured, and when she has subsequently to mention the sun in an indifferent speech, the actress turns to Petruchio and proffers the word in a roguish tone, as if to ask, whether he agrees that the sun is shining. One trait of this kind, interwoven by an intellectual actor, better illuminates whole scenes and characters of Shakespeare's plays, than long commentaries. This fine touch smoothes the way to the subsequent pliability of the changed woman, when she at length preaches that lesson of subjection, still a little in the manner of the old defiance, but now directed against the defying.

These then are the seven pieces, which lie at the outset of our poet's career; let us once more glance over them, that in the survey we may discern the general character,

which distinguishes them from the later works of Shakespeare. More or less, all the seven pieces betray the uncultured popular taste of the pre-Shakespeare age, both in matter and form. The barbarities in Titus, the coarseness of Pericles, the occasional severity in Henry VI., the rude character of the two comedies, the treatment of the iambic verse in Titus and the doggrel verse in the comedies, all this places these pieces in the history of English Literature at the time when Marlowe and Greene had not been eclipsed by Shakespeare. Previous to these pieces, we had known Shakespeare only as the author of descriptive poems. Passing over from these to dramas so diversified, misled by the dramatic form and the different material, we might believe that we had to do with quite another poet. But it is not so on closer inspection. There are not lacking, in all these pieces, remembrances of the Italian, the more classical school of poetry, which he followed in his descriptive writings. Pericles is derived from those romantic, half antique narrations, which the poets of the Italian school followed; from the Arcadia of Sidney, the main representative of this school, many expressions are faithfully copied. In Titus, the Ovid-like voluptuousness of the narrative poems is perceptible in the contents of the second act; at the only opportunity for it in Henry VI., Margaret's farewell to Suffolk, the same tone is for a moment apparent. In the short dialogue between Luciana and Antipholus in the Comedy of Errors, the thoughtful, antithetical, epigrammatic diction forcibly recalls to mind the conceits in Lucrece. Last of all, in the Taming of the Shrew, Shakespeare has made use of the comedy of a famed Italian master, as in the Comedy of Errors he has only revived a later comedy in imitation of the

Italian poets. All these pieces exhibit the poet as not far removed from school and its pursuits; in none of his later dramas does he plunge so deeply into the remembrances of antiquity, his head overflowing with the images, legends, and characters of ancient History. In *Titus*, we found the whole story composed from mere pieces of ancient legends and histories. As in *Kyd's Spanish Tragedy* there are long passages from Latin poets, so here a stanza from an ode of Horace has been admitted. In *Pericles*, as in a piece by Seneca, we have the apparition of Diana, and those scenes, which remind so strikingly of Ulysses' visit to the Phœaciens. In the *Comedy of Errors* and the *Taming of the Shrew*, we designated above those words of address in Homer's style. Like *Lucrece* and *Venus*, these pieces are redundant with allusions to greek mythology and ancient history. In these allusions, the Trojan legend stands pre-eminent, and indeed significantly from Virgil's view of it, as we find it in *Lucrece*. In the passage, where in *Henry VI.*, he alludes to Diomedes and Ulysses, when they "stole to Rhesus' tents, and brought from thence the Thracian fatal steeds", we perceive at once, how freshly the young poet was imbued with trojan history. The endeavour to display his learning, is not foreign to these pieces; and is not uncharacteristic of a beginner. We will not adduce the first part of *Henry VI.* in evidence, because the greater part of it is attributed to another writer; otherwise we perceive in it great ostentation of study of the Old Testament, of Roman history, of the Romances of the Paladin, and even of Froissart's Chronicle. But in the second and third part also, in Shakespeare's additions, the quotations from old myths and histories, are multiplied, and in the manner, in which he at one time inserts Ma-

chiavelli in the place of Catiline, and at another time Bargulus instead of the pirate Abradas, opportunity purposely is sought to display his own learning. But especially may the Taming of the Shrew be compared with the first part of Henry VI. in the manifold ostentation of book-learning. The intention of betraying a knowledge of language is found, with the exception of Love's Labour's Lost, in no subsequent play of Shakespeare's, in the manner in which it is in these seven; the scraps of foreign languages which he here uses in thorough earnestness, are later only employed as characteristics or in jest. In Titus, there are not only isolated latin passages, as is the case with almost all the pre-Shakespeare poets, but also french expressions are introduced in tragic pathos; in Pericles the devices of the knights are proclaimed in all languages, and among them there is a Spanish one with the error *più* for *mas*. In Henry VI. also, we meet with these scraps again in passages which are Shakespeare's property; the old Clifford expires with a french sentence, the young Rutland with a latin. Thus moreover in both comedies, latin, french, spanish, italian words and sentences are accumulated. We see then that uncertain and immature forms, coarser taste in the choice of subject and in the manner of working it, the presence of the school, the leaning to antiquity and to the learned circle of the Italian Romanticists of England, the eagerness to appear well read and full of knowledge, these were the familiar traits which distinguish these early productions of Shakespeare. Even their difference in matter, tone, and diction, proceeds from the further familiar characteristic, that they are all imitations of older works. The progress of the poet is clear and evident. In the three first pieces it is repressed by the weight of foreign

influence, and appears therefore in very different fashion; in the second and third part of Henry VI., he wrestles for the palm with a contemporary, in the Comedy of Errors with Plautus; in the Taming of the Shrew he casts away the form of his previous work, and stands upon his own ground. The importance, which this training upon other masters and writings exercised on Shakespeare's cultivation, is never sufficiently taken into account: the happiest instinct led the proud genius upon this modest path. No talent is more to be mistrusted, than that which, in early youth, aims at originality; self-conceit guides it upon this mistaken way, and want of nature will be the end at which it arrives. Every great artist has had such a period of training, in which he has trusted in an earlier master, in which he has chained himself to a foreign model, in order to learn from him. The scholar, who in this devotedness loses his independence, and surrenders himself to imitation, would certainly never have found out a way of his own. But true talent during the apprenticeship of youth only penetrates into the foreign mind, that it may, from the deepest knowledge of it, learn more acutely the difference of its own, and separate itself with greater independence. Thus have Raphael and Titian, thus have Goethe and Schiller practised on foreign masters in their art; the latter even on our Shakespeare himself. And thus did *he* also. He looked up to Plautus and Seneca, early and late, and free from every pretension; perhaps at first even to Marlowe and Greene. With these he certainly must soon have felt, that he could only learn, what he should *not* do; he improved the plays of Greene, while he elaborated them; he was reproached by Greene with having beautified himself with foreign feathers, but he was

himself conscious that in his turn he had invested them with ornament. The custom of that day that the poets of the different theatres borrowed their materials from each other, and worked them up afresh, was extraordinarily advantageous to the drama. From the gains and losses of other stages, the favourite subjects of the public were known, and in this manner they were rarely mistaken in the matter. Many hands were then engaged upon the same work; their elaborations were subject to the verdict of the public; the subject and its signification, the characters and their treatment, were thus refined. This was the case also with the ancient drama. In that youth of the world, there were few dramatic subjects, mythical or historical, existing at all; on each of these few every famous poet tried his skill; these continued attempts ripened at last into the pure form, which we admire in the Greek tragedies. Something of a similar but superficial character happened on the English stage; though here in the richer, more extensive works of modern taste, it would have been all the more necessary that the same should have taken place, and that even more fundamentally. But with Shakespeare, we can remark plainly in a progressive manner, how in the earlier dramas which he undertook to elaborate, he ever learned, in a masterly manner, to reject more of the shell, and to penetrate into the kernel of the subject and its inmost soul. This art he afterwards transferred even to his epic narrative sources, and he learned to give to the most superficial and frivolous story a psychological and moral depth.

SECOND PERIOD OF SHAKESPEARE'S DRAMATIC POETRY.

We pass from the first period of the dramatic career of our poet in which he appears only as the elaborator of foreign works, to a second, which we confine to the years between 1592 and 1600. In this short time, the poet rises with almost inconceivable activity from the scholar to the master, and passes through a mental history certainly of the most remarkable kind, although we possess only hints and conjectures, in determining its nature more closely. We cannot read the works of these years, without receiving an impression, for the most part, that the poet was passing through a happy, exultant period, when he wrote them. The untroubled gladness, the playful wantonness, which meets us in all the comedies of this period, the exuberance of mind, which bursts forth in Henry IV., allow us easily to argue as much inward self-reliance, as outward comfort on the part of the poet. We shall also subsequently find, when we return from the consideration of the works of this epoch, to the history of Shakespeare's Life, that his rapid success as actor and poet, his importance in higher society, his honourable connections and friendships, a

prosperous outward condition, which enabled him to relieve his parents effectually in their necessity, that all this, I say, shows a series of favourable circumstances, adapted to place the young poet in the happy mood, in which his talent could so quickly, so immeasurably, advance. At the end of this period a shadow seems cast over this happiness, which gave Shakespeare an impetus towards more serious contemplation and a still deeper penetration into human life. It is striking, that when between 1590 and 1600, comedy in the series of his writings had decidedly prevailed over tragedy, after that period, on the contrary, tragedy and the serious drama appear just as decidedly in the ascendant, and this very contrast obliges us, to date from it a third period of Shakesperian poetry.

The works of this period are in themselves singly significant and great; the group considered as a whole presents an especially remarkable appearance through the thorough many-sidedness, which appears in the subjects treated of. They are divided into three parts, distinguished by their innermost nature. In the commencement of this period we meet with a series of pieces of essentially erotic purport, whose central point is formed by the passions and the deeds of love: the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*. By the side of these lie all the histories, but one, which Shakespeare produced after *Henry VI.*, dramas of dry, real matter, the world of outer life and action placed as if in intentional contrast to that of feeling; opposed to it in equal extent, with equal emphasis: *Richard II. and III.*, *King John*, *Henry IV. and V.* At the close of this period lies a third group of comedies closely clustered together,

comedies in which Shakespeare, in the merriest freedom and joyfulness of mind, it seems, has raised this branch of art to the highest degree of perfection, and has maintained its cheerful character most pure and untroubled, thus making the sudden transition to the tragedies, in the third period of his poetry, all the more interesting. It is not possible with perfect certainty to assign to each of these works the year of its origin: but according to the concurring judgment of all critical authorities, they fall collectively within the period mentioned, or very little beyond it. Historical pieces and love-pieces were alternately worked up by the poet; the historical in no chronological series, but as the liking for the subject suggested them. We shall, therefore, in the discussion of these works, not bind ourselves too scrupulously to the order of time, but at once carry on the three series in their great divisions, and then examine and consider each single work separately, with all possible adherence to the probable chronology, if any thread may be perceived, which indicates to us, besides the chronology, another order of thoughts and feelings.

I. EROTIC PIECES.

We will speak first of the series of erotic pieces, in which Shakespeare has more or less exclusively represented the essence and nature of love. Of this kind are all the above-named pieces, whilst in Shakespeare's later dramas, it is only in true comedies that love-adventures form the central point, and this indeed only of the plot, and no longer as here; at the same time, the essence of the piece; whilst in his tragedies, they appear always only so far, as they represent, in

the great varieties of life itself, but one side of our existence. With our own German poets, even the greatest, this side of our being occupies far too wide a space, and must detract much from the wealth of their poetry, as compared with Shakespeare's works. They felt nothing of that natural impulse of the English poet, to establish themselves in the great sphere of active life, in history, in order to counter-balance the life of sentiment. Where they have interwoven a love-affair as an episode in a historical piece, the preference for the sentimental part prevailed, and the poetic brilliancy and energy centred in it. With this our sentimental poetry, it was almost universally, what Shakespeare says in *Love's Labour's Lost* :

"Never durst poet touch a pen to write,
Until his ink were tempered with love's sighs".

But it was not so with our poet himself. We may conclude from the circumstances of Shakespeare's life, that in his youth he may have been for a while, that which in *Love's Labour's Lost*, and the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, he calls the "votary to love", and this was indeed the very period, in which he created these love-pieces, which we shall next consider. But it was at all events only a period, a passing time, in which he was personally swayed by this passion, and poetically engaged with it; and in this poetic occupation he in no wise surrendered himself entirely, but took care, as we have said, in the happiest instinct of a many-sided nature, to maintain the just balance in his descriptions of the powerful life of feeling, by the contemplation of the great historical world of action.

If we lose sight of this grand double-sidedness, if we en-

tirely and solely become absorbed in the love-pieces of this period, we find, that he treated his theme, even in this exclusive direction, quite otherwise to our German poets. The ideal loveheroes of our own Schiller, the weak sensual characters of our Goethe, are, by that sentimental element which is infused throughout the love-poetry of a modern date, of one uniform colouring; therefore on our stage there is one fixed character of a lover, which the player to whom it is committed acts nearly always in the same manner. It was not thus in Shakespeare's time, and it is not so designed in his works. The vast theme, the passion of love, Shakespeare treated in a far grander manner. He depicted it not alone in reference to itself, but in the most manifold combination with other passions, and in the most wide spread relations to other human circumstances; it is to him a necessity, to represent it in the greatest fulness and variety possible, in its entire existence, in all its operations, in its good and its bad qualities, in those first five pieces, which we find devoted to this theme. He shows us in the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, how it is with a man who abandons himself wholly to this passion, and also its effect upon the energetic character, still a stranger to it. He shows in *Love's Labour's Lost*, how a set of youthful companions unnaturally endeavour to crush it by ascetic vows, and how the effort avenges itself. He shows in *All's Well that Ends Well*, how love is despised by manly haughtiness and pride of rank, and how it overcomes this by fidelity and devotion. He shows in the *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, in a marvellous allegory, the errors of blind unreasonable love, which carries man forward in a dream of life, devoid of reflection. He shows lastly, in that great song of love, in *Romeo and Juliet*, how

this most powerful of all passions seizes two human beings in its most fearful power, and, enhanced by natures favourable to its reception and by circumstances inimical to it, it is carried to the extent, in which it overstrains and annihilates itself. And when the poet, advanced to this extreme point, has measured this side of human nature in its breadth and depth, he returns, as it were, personally less concerned, back to himself, and in his later works does not readily again permit it such a wide and exclusive space.

This many-sidedness of love, its manifold bearings and effects upon human nature, Shakespeare alone of all poets, of all ages, has depicted in its mighty extent. Whoever hastily peruses the whole epic and dramatic poetry of France, Italy, and Spain, will find all the relations of love treated to tediousness after the same model and idea. This mannerism was a transmission from the middle ages, when knightly customs and gallantry first elevated sensual desires, and an extravagant adoration of women, unknown to the ancients, penetrated life and poetry. In this period love was regarded as a source of civilization, as a source even of power and action, and the poetic generations of succeeding times conceived it only from this its ennobling side, with a preference and exclusiveness, which such a judge of life, as Shakespeare, could not share. He had experienced also its shadow-side: how it is just as capable of paralyzing the power of action, of endangering morals, of plunging a man in destruction and crime, as of tending to purity of life, and of ennobling mind and spirit. This double nature and two-fold worth of love and its effects, Shakespeare had penetrated in his early youth. In *Venus and Adonis*, his first poem, the goddess after the death of her favourite utters a

curse upon love, which contains in the germ, as it were, the whole development of the subject, as Shakespeare has unfolded it in the series of his dramas. It is worth while to hear the passage in its whole extent.

“Since thou art dead, lo! here I prophesy,
Sorrow on love hereafter shall attend:
It shall be waited on with jealousy,
Find sweet beginning, but unsavoury end;
Ne’er settled equally, but high or low,
That all love’s pleasure shall not match his woe.

It shall be fickle, false, and full of fraud;
Bud, and be blasted in a breathing-while;
The bottom poison, and the top o’erstrawed
With sweets, that shall the truest sight beguile:
The strongest body shall it make most weak,
Strike the wise dumb, and teach the fool to speak.

It shall be sparing, and too full of riot,
Teaching decrepit age to tread the measures;
The staring ruffian shall it keep in quiet,
Pluck down the rich, enrich the poor with treasures:
It shall be raging mad, and silly mild,
Make the young old, the old become a child.

It shall suspect, where is no cause of fear;
It shall not fear, where it should most distrust;
It shall be merciful, and too severe,
And most deceiving, when it seems most just;
Perverse it shall be, where it shows most toward;
Put fear to valour, courage to the coward.

It shall be cause of war, and dire events,
And set dissension ’twixt the son and sire;
Subject and servile to all discontents,
As dry combustious matter is to fire”.

We must remember that this is written at an age, which in the first strength of feeling sees love generally only in the brightest light, and that it is placed in a poem, which appeared to deify the sensual desire in the customary man-

ner of young poets, we must, I say, remember the period and the position of this passage, in order rightly to appreciate its value and importance. In the love-pieces of the period, which we shall consider, these thoughts are variously repeated on more forcible occasions, and appear in choice sentences and passages; and far more than this, they are also exhibited and embodied throughout Shakespeare's works, in characters, circumstances, and living images, in a fulness and depth, such as never has been the case with any other poet. And not alone, in opposition to all usual poetry, is the curse of love carried out in these pictures, but its richest blessing is unfolded in just as many counter-pieces, with just as much ardour, and with the same life. That in this passion the rich covetous man is "plucked down" and deceived, the poor man elevated and enriched, we read in the Merchant of Venice. That it makes a simpleton of the spendthrift, a ruffian of the weak, is represented in Rodrigo. That it affects the wise, and that it is hardly united with reason and reflection, Measure for Measure brings before us. That it teaches fools to speak and makes the old young, in how many excellent caricatures has this been displayed by the burlesque parts of Shakespeare's comedies! That it selects the "finest wits", and often makes them its prey, is expressed in that graceful, oft-repeated image, "in the sweetest bud the eating canker dwells"; and again in other pictures, as in the Tempest, the most charming innocence appears seized by this spirit, without being even slightly injured in its stainless purity. That it is "fickle, false, and full of fraud", that it forswears itself, that the strongest of love's "oaths are straw to the fire of the blood", is exhibited in the Two Gentlemen of

Verona, at the same time that true love, full of inner beauty, shames the fickleness of the unfaithful, by deeds of sacrifice. The basest and most exalted phases of this fierce passion are to be found in *Troilus and Cressida*, in the highly ironical picture of the trojan contest, in the parody of the immortal song on that love, which was the cause of so long a war and of such frightful deeds. And then, in contrast to this excited drama stands a thoroughly spiritual picture: how love works up the senses and the spirits, how it is the creator and the created of fancy, the perpetual subject and the source of poetry, in what charming touches and symbols is this interwoven with the magic pictures of the *Midsummer Night's Dream*! How love surprises the man in idleness, when the character is relaxed in inactivity, how it then fills his whole being, and digresses from the valour of a man, is represented in *Romeo*, in *Proteus*, and in *Antony*, but in *Othello* the heroic nature permits not love to enchain him by idle pleasures, and "with wanton dulness" to foil "his speculative and active instruments". That jealousy is the attendant of love, and excites suspicion where there is no cause for it, and fears not, where there is ground for mistrust, is the subject of this same tragedy of *Othello*, and of the *Winter's Tale*; how on the other hand, this "green-eyed monster" may be overcome by a harmonious nature and confiding trust, is developed in strong contrast in the story of *Posthumus and Imogen*. That love is shared by high and low, that it may begin with bitterness and end with sweetness, is well depicted in *All's Well that Ends Well*; but the main theme of the curse of the goddess of love, that "all love's pleasure shall not match his woe", that it "finds sweet beginning, but unsavoury end", that it has

"the bottom poison, and the top o'erstrawed with sweets", that it "buds, and is blasted in a breathing while", that violent in kind it leads to desperate resolutions, and spends itself like a lightning flash, this is immortally sketched in the poem of *Romeo and Juliet*. It comprises the whole theme, which other poems and poets have broken into such manifold parts, into one exuberant production. That love in its full power is in constant fatal struggle with class-prejudice and propriety, this has been the central point of all tragic portrayals of love, in life and poetry, at all times. "Love's not love when 'tis mingled with respects": this is the mark by which Nature and the poet denote the passion in its greatest power; in this its strength, the conflict of nature against custom, of all-powerful, boundless feeling against the necessary restraints of social life, is unavoidable, and in this collision the tragical nature of this passion is grounded, which no poet has ever depicted like Shakespeare in *Romeo and Juliet*, with the same surpassing repose and yet lively emotion, the same excitement and yet moral ingenuousness, the same fervour of personal experience and yet mental impartiality. "It is the only piece", the cold Lessing said, "which love itself has, as it were, helped to write."

THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA.

In the series of the erotic pieces of this period, in accordance with most English critics, we place the *Two Gentlemen of Verona* first. It is generally assigned to 1591, a date previous to the *Comedy of Errors*. The single long doggrel verses in the burlesque parts, the repeated alliteration, many lyric passages in the sonnet-style of tender but undramatic poetry, place the piece in the poet's earliest period. Plot and character are not here equally considered as in the *Taming of the Shrew*, but they are blended. The action calls to mind in its main part the history of Felix and Felismena (in the *Diana of Montemayor*) which may have been known to Shakespeare from an earlier dramatic handling of the subject (the history of Felix and Philomena 1584) or from the MS. of the translation of the *Diana* by Bartholomew Yonge, not printed before 1598; the plot is somewhat poor and slight: but the traits of delicate characterization on the other hand, begin here, almost for the first time, to stand forth in that fulness, which in the characters of the seven merely elaborated pieces, with the exception perhaps of *Petruchio* and *Katharine*, does not appear.

The piece treats of the essence and the power of love, and especially of its influence upon judgment and habit generally, and it is not well to impute to it a more defined idea. The twofold nature of love is here at the outset exhibited with that equal emphasis upon both sides and that perfect impartiality, by which Goethe was so struck in Shakespeare's writings. The solving of this opposite problem, the poet facilitated by an æsthetic artifice which is quite peculiar to him, which we find especially evident in this youthful work, and which we see repeated in almost all his dramas. The structure and design of the piece are carried out in strict parallel; the characters and events are so exactly brought into relation and opposition, that not only those of a similar nature, but even those of a contrary, serve mutually to explain each other. We shall place the emphasis of our discussions upon this point.

Two friends are separating in the first scene, Valentine and Proteus. The names have already a significance, which hints at their opposite characters. Valentine, a good honest nature, is a man of action; urged by honour to cast himself into the world abroad, into military and courtly service, he is just travelling to Milan; he is of the simplest, plainest kind of country-gentleman, with no finely sifted speech; with him heart and lips are one; his generosity knows no doubt; himself good, he deems the bad, good also; his nature is not soon affected by any emotion, his acts are not disturbed by reflections. A golden friend, ready for every great sacrifice, he is yet without affection for the other sex; his derision is rather provoked by the absorbing passion of his more excitable friend. Proteus, on the contrary, is a man of reflection, full of enticing virtues

and faults, and of great mental capability. It is said of him that of many good he is the best; this goodness is exhibited throughout the piece (and this is a decided error) not in deeds, but only in the superiority of his talents. Entirely given up to love, completely filled with its desires and aspirations, he accuses himself of spending his days in "shapeless idleness"; in danger through selfishness and love of enjoyment, of renouncing his manly character, he appears as a youth of that young and tender wit, which like "the most forward bud is eaten by the canker ere it blow". The one-sidedness of each character is now to find its complement, as it were, as a corrective. Proteus in the midst of his successful suit, is, to his despair, sent by his father to Valentine in Milan, in order like him to be "tutored in the world"; on the other hand Valentine's original bent for "active deeds" meets with penance, as he himself calls it in Act II., sc. 4, in that in Milan, Silvia, the daughter of the Duke, falls in love with him. For Valentine, this new condition brings an increase of experience and refinement, which he appropriates after his own fashion; for Proteus, the change causes a restraint, against which his self-loving nature struggles. The way in which both behave in this change of situation is developed in the finest manner from the original disposition of their characters. The honest, unsuspecting Valentine, occupied with manly dealings, must be sought after by love, if love would touch him; the daughter of the Duke before all others fascinates him as an object, which at the same time excites his aspiring ambition. But, as we should expect from him, he acts like a novice in the work of love; he betrays his increasing inclination by open "gazing" noticeable by all, and by imperious offensive

treatment of his rival Thurio. When she meets his modesty and woos him in her letter, he understands her not, and his servant Speed is obliged to explain her intention. His wont, when he laughed, to crow like a cock, when he walked, to walk like one of the lions, is now passed away; his friend Proteus might now find matter for ridicule in the metamorphosis, which love has effected. Since difference of position places obstacles to a union, with his peculiar want of consideration and readiness for action, he enters upon a plan for eloping with Silvia; instead of guarding himself from the snares of the Duke, unsuspecting and confident he proceeds to entangle himself still further. When his plan of elopement has been punished with banishment, he surrenders himself passively and unhesitatingly to a band of outlaws; desperation urges him, the active life suits him, the man who invites his company, touches his heart by the similar fate, which he too has suffered. To this extremity has the treachery of his friend driven him. For Proteus, as soon as he had arrived at Milan, had at once forgotten his Julia. His love is first and foremost, self-love. Completely absorbed in the one affection, arrived at Milan, separated from Julia, his weak, love-seeking nature endures not for a moment the unusual void and desolation. As Romeo, rejected by his beloved, all the more violently falls in love with a new object, so does Proteus, when separated from Julia; he casts his eye upon the beloved of his friend, and giving way to this one error, he falls from sin to sin, and runs the gauntlet of crime. Once befooled by the intoxication of the senses, with the finest sophistry he knows how to justify and to excuse his misdeeds. False and wavering, he forgets his oath to Julia, he ensnares the duke, he betrays his friend, he goes

so far in baseness, that he proposes slander as a means for making Silvia forget Valentine, and he himself undertakes the office of slanderer. His behaviour towards his rival Thurio shows what a judge he is of love, with what power he practises the arts of love, how secure and victorious he knows himself compared to such an adversary. He teaches him the secrets of love, well knowing that he understands them not; he, a poet himself, enjoins him to woo Silvia by "wailful sonnets", when he knows, that he can only fashion miserable rhymes. In the amorous style of the three lovers, the poet has given us an excellent insight into their capacity for love. In the verses of Thurio, we see some paltry insipid rhymes, which German translators have too confidently received as a specimen of the genuine Shakespearian lyric. The poet possesses true poetry enough not to fear putting silly verses in the lips of the silly wooer, and thus, whilst he intentionally inserts a poem of no merit, he acquires the further merit of a characteristic touch. The poem, which Valentine addresses to Silvia (Act III. sc. 1.), is of the same characteristic kind, composed in the usual conceit-style of love, it testifies of tolerable awkwardness of rhyming talent, and is rather the work of the brain, than the outpouring of excited feeling. Of Proteus, we have only fragments and scattered words, which Julia imparts to us from his torn letter: "kind Julia, — love-wounded Proteus, — poor, forlorn Proteus, passionate Proteus, to the sweet Julia", — words sufficient to tell us, that among the three this is the man who understands the true rhetoric of love. With this letter he had taken by storm the free heart of the unguarded, unsuspecting Julia; but so well does he understand the strategy of love, that towards Silvia, whose heart was given

to Valentine, he needed more studied tactics, and for this reason he seizes every opening, procures himself helpers and allies in the father and the rival, and endeavours to insinuate himself by the cunning of slander. He has reckoned every point, but that of a woman's character, which has as much masculine power about it, as his own has feminine weakness.

The beloved ones stand in reversed contrast to the two lovers. The fair Julia, the friend of Proteus, is in the same measure a pure womanly nature, as Valentine is a pure manly one. Chaste, reserved, observing the strictest modesty, she must be sought by Proteus, and will hardly allow him to seek her; she will not believe her Lucetta, that "fire, that is closest kept, burns most of all," for she has not yet gained the experience, which she subsequently expresses in almost the same words. When Proteus' love first finds a hearing, she remains in her quiet thoughtful life the same sweet being; at the moment of farewell her full heart finds not a word. But separated from Proteus, she experiences like Valentine the change in her whole being; the energy and vehemence of his passion are kindled in herself, as Silvia's inconsiderate desire for flight is in Valentine. She undertakes a journey after the man of her heart, she dreams of Elysium at the end of it, at that point at which she is to be awakened from her dream by the faithlessness of Proteus. The consideration cannot restrain her, that the step may "make her scandalized". She experiences in herself, how the purest, most guiltless love endures most heavily the hindrances in its path. The beloved of Valentine is exhibited in as great a contrast to this gentle creature, as Proteus is to Valentine. The auburn-haired Silvia, rash,

reckless, steps somewhat beyond the sphere of a woman's nature; she is less tender than Valentine and Julia, more intellectual and clever, like the scheming Proteus; teasingly she delights in putting off Thurio and in deriding him; she possesses that ready wit, with which Shakespeare has invested all his bolder prominent female characters. She herself makes advances to Valentine, she perceives the hopelessness of their love, and contrives a plan for flight; she sees through Proteus and his tissue of faithlessness; she abandons at last her position and her father to follow Valentine, and observant of human nature and certain of success, she chooses in Eglamour a companion in whose faith and honour she can repose, who himself has loved and has lost his beloved.

The plot is unravelled at length by a romantic meeting of all in a conclusion, which appears to all critics sudden, abrupt, and inartistic. It is also undeniable that here the form of the plot is carelessly treated. We must, however, be cautious not to criticise rashly. Thus it is just in this instance, that the unravelling of the plot has been for the most part attacked from a psychological point of view, where it is most to be defended. It is, namely, essentially brought about by the offer of Valentine, to sacrifice his beloved one to his faithless friend. This Charles Lamb and many others considered an unjustified act of an exaggerated heroism of friendship. But this trait essentially belongs to Valentine's character. That it did not intentionless escape the poet may also be traced from the mere parallelism observed throughout the composition. For Julia also is exhibited to us from the same aspect of resignation and self-renunciation springing from pure good-nature, which in her as in Valentine stands out in contrast to the self-love of Proteus. She entered Proteus'

service as a page, she delivers his messages to Silvia with the intention of playing the fox, as "shepherd of his lambs", but Silvia so attracts her, that her hostile intention is at once disarmed. Valentine subjected to the most violent alternation of feeling, with a nature quick to perceive and quicker to act, is in this scene of the catastrophe wrought up to the highest pitch of excitement. Longer and more enchained to his friend than to Silvia, and according to his nature not comprehending the base in one whom he had believed to be noble, this same man, who immediately afterwards in the presence of the Duke threatens the hated Thurio with death, in the moment when he learns the treachery of his friend, when he even sees him place "rude, uncivil touch" upon Silvia, has no wrath, no revengeful feeling against him; nothing but the bitter sigh of disappointment: "I am sorry, I must never trust thee more, but count the world a stranger for thy sake." Of the possession of Silvia, the outlaw may not think; to win back his repentant friend, the noble-minded man offers his greatest sacrifice. His feelings, according to his nature, overcome him at the outset; Proteus, on the contrary, sees a way out of his errors from a remark of Julia's, which speaks rather to his head than to his heart, and goads with cutting reproof his sense of honour far more than his feeling.

All this indeed is finely designed, full of striking traits of character, and all from one fount. Compared to Shakespeare's later works, it is nevertheless of a lighter kind; but still important enough to outweigh whole opera omnia of our Romanticists, who ventured to blame their hero-poet in this piece, imagining that the love-phrases were to represent love, and the heroic-phrases heroism.

Thus said Franz Horn; Tieck made another observation, which proves to us an examination no less superficial. He considered that the low comic scenes, the heroes of which are the servants Speed and Launce, are not connected with the subject, but are intended only to excite laughter. In this manner, as we have before learned, the poets before Shakespeare worked at the burlesque parts of their dramas, in order to meet the taste of the vulgar. And similar also are Shakespeare's early attempts, in the Comedy of Errors and in the Taming of the Shrew, where the Dromios and Grumios, with their coarse jests, form an outwork of no importance, in so far as they have no influence as active characters upon the intricacies of the plot. This, however, is now changed here in the Two Gentleman of Verona; and ever after Shakespeare in obedience to the necessity in which he saw himself placed, of satisfying in some measure the rough taste of a laughter-loving public, seized that skilful expedient to which we have also before alluded: he gave henceforth to his lower comic parts a close reference to the main actions of the piece. Not alone are the servants Speed and Launce placed in characteristic opposition to their masters, the witty Speed to the simple Valentine, the awkward Launce to the clever Proteus; not alone are they stationed by the side of their masters as disinterested observers, to whose extreme simplicity that is apparent, which in the infatuation of passion escapes the understanding of the wise: so that Speed perceives the love of Silvia before his master, and even the simple Launce sees through the knavish tricks of his lord; but they are also by actions of their own placed as a parody by the side of the main action, in a manner which invests even the commonest with a high moral value. Launce's

account of his farewell may be regarded as a parody of Julia's silent parting from Proteus; the scene, in which Speed "thrusts himself" into Launce's love-affairs and "will be swung for it", caricatures the false intrusion of Proteus into Valentine's love; but a deeper sense still have the stories of the rough Launce and his dog Crab, the very scenes which undoubtedly occur to the gentler reader as most offensive. To the silly semi-brute fellow, who sympathizes with his beast almost more than with men, his dog is his best friend. He has suffered stripes for him, he has taken his faults upon himself, and has been willing to sacrifice everything to him. At last, self-sacrificing like Valentine and Julia, even this friend he will himself resign, his best possession he will abandon to do a service to his master. With this capacity for sacrifice, this simple child of nature is placed by the side of that splendid model of manly endowments, Proteus, who, self-seeking, betrayed friend and lover. And then this fine relation of the lower to the higher parts of the piece is so skilfully concealed by the removal of all moralizing from the action, that the cultivated examiner of the piece finds the objective effect of the action in no wise disturbed, while the groundling of the pit tastes unimpeded his pure delight in common nature.

LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST AND ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

The comedy of Love's Labour's Lost belongs indisputably to the earliest dramas of the poet, and will be almost of the same date as the Two Gentlemen of Verona. The peculiarities of Shakespeare's youthful pieces are here perhaps most accumulated. The reiterated mention of mythological and historical personages, the air of learning, the Italian and Latin expressions, which here, it must be admitted, serve a comic end, the older English versification, the numerous doggrel verses, and the rhymes more frequent than anywhere else and extending over almost the half of the play, — all this places this work among the earlier efforts of the poet. Alliteration, a silent legacy from anglo-saxon literature, and much more in use in the popular and more refined poems of England than in any other language, we meet with here still more than in the narrative poems, the sonnets, and the Two Gentlemen of Verona; it is expressly employed in his poetry by the pedant Holofernes, who calls the art "to affect the letter". The style is frequently like that of the Shakespearian sonnets, indeed the 127th and 137th of Shakespeare's sonnets bear express similarities to those inserted here as well as to other passages of the

piece (Act IV. sc. 3.). The tone of the Italian school prevails more than in any other play. The redundance of wit is only to be compared with the similar redundance of conceit in Shakespeare's narrative poems, and with the Italian style in general, which he at first adopted.

From this over-abundance of droll and laughter-loving personages, of wits and caricatures, the comedy gives the idea of an excessively jocular play; nevertheless every one on reading it feels a certain want of ease, and on account of this very excess, cannot enjoy the comic effect. In structure and management of subject, it is indisputably one of the weakest of the poet's pieces; yet one divines a deeper merit than is readily perceived, and which is with difficulty unfolded. No source is known for the purport of the piece, which, however, (as Hunter has proved from Monstrelet's chronicles,) in the one point of the payment of France to Navarre (Act II. sc. 2.), rests on a historical fact, an exchange of territory between the two crowns; the poet, who scarcely ever aspired after the equivocal merit of inventing his stories himself, seems according to this to have himself devised the matter, which suffers from a striking lack of action and characterization. The whole turns upon a clever interchange of wit and asceticism, jest and earnest; the shallow characters are forms of mind, rather proceeding from the cultivation of the head than the will; throughout there are affected jests, high-sounding and often empty words, but no action, and notwithstanding one feels, that this deficiency is no unintentional error, but that there is an object in view. There is a motley mixture of fantastic and strange characters, which for the most part betray no healthy groundwork of nature, and yet the poet himself is so sensible of this,

that we might trust him to have had his reason for placing them together, a reason worth our while to seek. And indeed we find on closer inspection, that this piece has a more profound character, in which Shakespeare's capable mind already unfolds its power; we perceive in this, the first of his plays, in which he, as subsequently is ever the case, has had one single moral aim in view, an aim that here lies even far less concealed than in others of his works.

We will start with the observation, with which we concluded the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*: — namely, that Shakespeare did not disdain to retain the favourite subjects, characters, and jests of the older low comedy, but that he knew how to dignify these by the profound signification, which he gave them. This is attested in this piece by a much more brilliant example than in the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. In the burlesque parts of *Love's Labour's Lost*, we meet with two favourite characters or caricatures of the Italian comedy, the *Pedant*, the schoolmaster and grammarian, and the military *Braggart*, the *Thraso* of the Latin, the "capitan Spavento" of the Italian stage. These stationary characters Shakespeare has depicted with such life, that it has been supposed and has been endeavoured to be proved, that the poet portrayed in them persons living at the time, in Armado, "a vain fantastical man", Monarcho, (thus he once calls him,) in Holofernes, the Italian teacher Florio in London. The characteristics of both are exaggerated, as they could only be in the rudest popular comedy. Armado, the military braggart in the state of peace, as Parolles is in war, appears in the ridiculous exaggeration and affectation of a child of hot Spanish fancy, assuming a contempt towards everything common, boastful but poor, a coiner of

words but most ignorant, solemnly grave and laughably awkward, a hector and a coward, of gait majestic and of the lowest propensities. The schoolmaster Holofernes stands among the many enamoured characters of the comedy as a dry inanimate pedant, an imaginary word-sifter, a poor poet of the school of the Carmelite Mantuan, fantastically vain of his empty knowledge. Both caricatures become still more distorted, when they are seen by the light of the contrast, which the poet has placed beside them: to the stiff, weak, melancholy Armado is opposed the little Moth, who, light as his name, is all jest and playfulness, versatility and cunning; to the pedant Holofernes, there stands in opposition the child of nature Costard, whose common sense ridicules the scholar, who lives "on the alms-basket of words". The two characters, we see, are caricatures, taken from simple nature, exhibited in their effort to attract attention, in their ostentation, vanity, and empty thirst for fame, based upon an appearance of knowledge and a show of valour.

But these two originals and their gross desire for glory, have been associated by Shakespeare with a society of finer mould, which suffers from the same infirmity, only that from their mind and culture, the poison lies deeper concealed in them. The court of Navarre had for three years devoted itself to study and retirement; the young king, seized with an ascetic turn, in the spirit of the courts of love and the vow-loving chivalry of those regions, desires that his young courtiers should with him change the court and its revels into an academy of contemplation, should mortify their passions and worldly desires, and renounce for the time intercourse with women. He is on the same track, erring from a vain desire for glory; he wishes to make Navarre a won-

der of the world. The piece begins somewhat in Armado's style with the king's majestic words :

"Let fame, that all hunt after in their lives,
Live registered upon our brazen tombs,
And then grace us in the disgrace of death".

In his company is Dumain, "a well-accomplished youth, of all that virtue love, for virtue loved", endowed with the power, but not with the will to "do harm", stoical enough to choose subsequently the disfigured Katharine among the French ladies; this Dumain is placed near the king, as most ready and able to enter into his abstemious resolve. But Biron and the tall versatile Longaville, of kindred mind, and equal wit, seriously oppose the romantic plan. Biron, who had ever been "love's whip", believes that on this point he is able to obey the proposed laws as well as any; so much the more he feels himself justified in warning against playing with oaths that may be broken, as "young blood will not obey an old decree". An Epicurean, accustomed to good food and sleep, he turns indignantly from the desolate task of mortification; he calls all delight vain,

"But that most vain,
Which, with pain purchased, doth inherit pain";

his more frivolous nature disdains most of all the dull vanity of study, which overshoots itself; he compares this thirst for fame expressly with the vain desires for honour exhibited by the scholar, and the word-monger.

The king has chosen Armado to amuse them during their hermit-life by his minstrelsy; and similar to the contempt with which the king regards his boasting vein, is the scorn with which Biron views the learned and ascetic vanity of the king; but he has himself fallen into a still lighter

vanity, for which Rosaline's censure touches him. Endowed with a keen eye and an acute mind, of captivating and touching eloquence, he has habituated himself to see every object in a ridiculous light, and to consider nothing sacred. The ardent black-eyed Rosaline, who is in no wise insensible to such mental gifts, but holds her part victorious in the war of words, considers him at first within the limits of becoming wit; she would not otherwise have loved him. But at last she agrees with the verdict of the world, which condemns him as a man replete with wounding and unsparing satire. And she sees the origin of this evil habit entirely in the vanity which delights in "that loose grace, which shallow laughing hearers give to fools". She sees him abandoned to the same empty desire for unsubstantial applause, as he does those who are placed at his side.

In passages, which are unessential to the course of the real action, the poet has still more plainly exhibited the object, which he had in view, however evidently it had been developed in the combination of characters. At the beginning of the 4th Act, the French princess in the course of a conversation with the forester makes this remark:

"Glory grows guilty of detested crimes;
When for fame's sake, for praise, an outward part,
We bend to that the working of the heart".

Thus is it with these men of ascetic vows, at least in the sight of the French princess. Rightly had Biron warned them, that

"Study evermore is overshot;
While it doth study to have what it would,
It doth forget to do the thing it should".

They had forgotten at the very moment of their oath, that

their vows in respect to intercourse with women could not be kept, as the daughter of the sick king of France had arrived on urgent business. Intercourse with her is not to be avoided; she is lodged with her suite in the Park. These French ladies and their attendant Boyet are now placed in contrast with the romantic band of men; they appear happy, graceful, practical, fully bent upon the serious object of their journey, which is no less a one than to obtain from Navarre the province of Aquitain. Besides in the cheerfulness of a good conscience, in jest and wit, they are superior to the lords of Navarre; Biron at first looks down jealously and maliciously upon the accomplished courtier, the "old mocker" Boyet, and his wit, as upon a "wit's pedler", but he finds subsequently, when his anger has cooled, that he "must needs be friends" with him. The truth of Biron's predictions is now proved by the ascetics. The French ladies delight in their folly, sure of obtaining their object the more easily, and the young lords to boot: the votaries of abstinence, Biron as much as Armado and Costard, all fall in love, and all, even Biron, the ridiculer of poetry, woo in heart-breaking sonnets, and when they mutually discover their weakness, use all their sophistry to set aside their oath as inadmissible "treason 'gainst the kingly state of youth". But the French ladies take it not so lightly. When the nobles first appear in their Russian habits, the ladies mislead them in a spirit of piquant raillery, and each, deceived by their disguise, woos contrary to his intention; thus they now become perjured through ignorance, as before in perfect consciousness. The ladies cut them with their mocking tongues as keenly as with "the razor's edge"; and when the king declares the breach of his vow, and invites them to his court,

the princess shames him by refusing to be "a breaking-cause of heavenly oaths". But that the French ladies may not be deemed as over-severe moralists, whose verdict would perhaps too widely differ from that of the poet himself, is a point carefully guarded by Shakespeare, since he gives us an insight into their tone of conversation among themselves and with Boyet, a conversation which strikes even the peasant Costard by its sweet vulgarity and smooth obscenity. Possibly a thrust at French manners, an opportunity that no English poet at that time would readily miss, was intended by the scene, but certain it is also that the design of the poet was at the same time at work, that the meaning of his piece might as little as possible be left in the dark.

But if in all that we have adduced, the poet's intention in *Love's Labour's Lost*, be not yet clearly evidenced, he has given the catastrophe, which concludes the merry comedy, a striking turn, in order to make it most glaringly clear. The nobles order a play to be represented before the ladies by their musicians and attendants, and by this means, they revenge themselves on the director Holofernes for their own spoilt masquerade, by spoiling his pageant also, which was one of those simple popular plays such as Shakespeare ridicules in the *Midsummer Night's-Dream*, but ridicules in a kindly spirit, honouring the good will, one of those innocent sports, which best please, because "they least know how". But in the midst of extravagant jest and folly, a discord rings through the piece: the king of France is dead, and sorrow and parting interrupt the mirth. The embarrassed king attempts an unintelligible wooing, the embarrassed Biron endeavours to explain it, and becomes confused and perplexed himself; but the princess banishes the perjured

guilt-burdened king for a year to a hermitage, if he wishes to have his request granted; Rosaline sends the mocker Biron to a hospital, where for a twelvemonth he is to jest with the sick, and if possible to be cured of his fault. Love's labour is lost; "Jack hath not Jill", contrary to the custom of comedy; it is a comedy that ends in tears. Certainly this conclusion is in opposition to all æsthetic antecedence, but the catastrophe is genuinely Shakespearian; for moral rectitude was ever the poet's aim rather than a strict adherence to the rules of art.

We have made it perhaps almost too prominent, that Shakespeare in this piece attacks a vain desire of fame in all its forms; but we cannot in Germany be too clear, if we would repudiate certain perversities of criticism, which have repeatedly placed Shakespeare in an entirely false light. To our Romanticists, the conclusion of the piece was too grave, too severe for their lax morality; unequal to the poet's austerity, they perceived everywhere irony, where he wrote in the most sober earnestness. Biron, thus Tieck interprets the conclusion of the piece in reference to which men of simple understanding have nothing to explain, Biron, whilst he promises to "jest a twelvemonth in an hospital", casts a side-glance upon his companions: "These for a year would dispute with learning and wit, write verses on their love, carry on their jests, and even Armado is not wanting to them, even Costard will not withdraw, and the new acquaintance with Holofernes will not even be given up. *This company is the Hospital!!*" But we feel indeed, that a kind of moral stupidity is requisite to believe that after this agitating conclusion, sophistry, playfulness, and jesting can begin afresh, and comedy resume its place.

This strange notion accords with the predilection, which our Romanticists feel for the humorous characters of the poet. The Biron, the Benedicks, the Mercutios were above all other characters their declared favourites. And indeed they are all of them, such as the poet designed them, characters excellently designed by nature: straightforward and free from all sentimentality, despisers of and adversaries to love-trifling, sound realists, clever fellows with a witty tongue and a ready sword behind, at once wits and bullies. That Shakespeare personally partook of this kind of nature, may be proved; that this nature was only one side of him, is of necessity confirmed by the whole fashion of his versatile mind. That he conceived not those characters with the exclusive preference of our Romanticists, and would not idealize, is thus a natural consequence, and may be proved in the most indisputable manner to the unbiassed mind. Whoever reads the comic scenes, "the civil war of wits" between Boyet and his ladies, between Biron and Rosaline, between Mercutio and Romeo, Benedick and Beatrice, and others, scenes, which in *Love's Labour's Lost* for the first time occur in more decided form and in far greater abundance than elsewhere, whoever attentively reads and compares them, will readily see that they rest upon a common human basis and at the same time upon a conventional one as to time and place. They hinge especially on the play and perversion of words; and this is the foundation for wit common in every age. Even in the present day we have but to analyze the wit amongst jovial men, to find that it always proceeds from punning and quibbling. That which in Shakespeare then is the conventional peculiarity, is the determined form in which this word-wit appears. This form

was cultivated among the English people according to an established custom, which invested jocose conversation with the character of a regular battle. They snatch a word, a sentence, from the mouth of the adversary whom they wish to provoke, and turn and pervert it into a weapon against him; he parries the thrust and strikes back, espying a similar weakness in his enemy's ward; the longer the battle is sustained, the better; he who can do no more is vanquished. In this piece of Shakespeare's, Armado names this war of words an *argument*; it is clearly designated as like a game at tennis, where the words are hurled, caught, and thrown back again, where he loses, who allows the word, like the ball, to fall; this war of wit is compared to a battle, that between Boyet and Biron for example to a sea-fight. The manner in which wit and satire here thus wage war, is by no means Shakespeare's property; it is universally found on the English stage, and is transferred to it directly from life. What we know of Shakespeare's social life, reveals to us this same kind of jesting in his personal intercourse. Tradition speaks of Shakespeare as "a handsome, well-shaped man, very good company, and of a very ready and pleasant and smooth wit." At the Mermaid in Friday-street, he associated with Beaumont, Fletcher, Selden, Ben Jonson, and other intellectual contemporaries, and there according to Beaumont in his address to Ben Jonson, were

"heard words that have been
So nimble, and so full of subtle flame,
As if that every one from whom they came,
Had meant to put his whole wit in a jest".

Especially famous were the meetings between Shakespeare and Ben Jonson; according to Fuller, they were

accustomed to meet, unlike a Spanish great galleon, and an English man of war: Master Jonson, like the former, was built far higher in learning; solid but slow in his performances; Shakespeare, like the English man of war, lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about, and take advantage of all winds by the quickness of his wit and invention". So that thus these "wit-combats" in Shakespeare's life are compared to the same image as those between Boyet and Biron in *Love's Labour's Lost*. If beyond these intimations we look for more distinct proof of the diffusion among the people of this kind of "wit-combats", we must turn our eyes upon Tarlton's jests. There we shall find that the merry man would engage in a witty conflict sometimes with a roguish boy, sometimes with a house-keeper, sometimes with a constable, when, just as in a comedy, the task, the pride, and the victory is to drive the adversary to a non-plus, that is, to exhaust his wit and bring him to silence. From all this we see that these humorous combats and combatants were a custom of the age, which Shakespeare could not avoid, but which he had as little cause to spare as any other custom which had grown into an abuse. We can easily understand how a practice so widely spread among men of versatile mind and manners, would become a fashion, and in such case would have been as wearisome as any other habit to Shakespeare's active mind. We understand further, how with these professional wits, the habit could be easily carried so far as to make the cheerful humour degenerate into scorn, and to pervert the "pleasant smooth wit" into motiveless and insipid jeering; to lead to quarrels, to turn the wit into a bully. Such natures has Shakespeare depicted in Biron and Mer-

cutio, and this with that perfect impartiality with which he does justice to every quality. An equal sense for jest and earnest, ever according to the demands of life and opportunity, was the ideal of human intercourse to which Shakespeare would have rendered homage. For, however penetrated he was with this idea, that moderate cheerful jest confirmed and promoted the truth and freedom of the mind, he knew this also, that laughers by profession never pierce through the surface of things, where, as Bacon says, is the seat of jest. Throughout, therefore, he has given his soundest humourists the soundest part of the seriousness of life, as their dowry. Thus in *Much Ado about Nothing* he has made his Benedick a much more perfect character than Biron and Mercutio. In the intercourse of Beatrice with Benedick there is the same playful tone of raillery, as in that between Biron and Rosaline; a similarly tragic discord interrupts the mirth; the poet's aim is the same in this far more delicately constructed piece: the stern reality of life bursts suddenly upon the laughing bantering couple, and they win each other from the fact that they know how to meet seriously these serious demands, which Biron is first to learn after Rosaline's censure. With a predilection however of almost an entirely pathological character, Shakespeare drew his Prince Henry, a being as of two natures, a hero like none other and a laugher like none other, who amid work and pastime, amid noble exertion and playful recreation, ever with the happiest equality stood ready for the demands of the moment. Moreover for him who will not purposely blind himself, the poet has expressed as distinctly as possible his own serious views upon those humorous habits of the time. In *All's Well that Ends Well*, the king

depicts the old count of Roussillon as an ideal of chivalry and education. He possessed, said the panegyrist,

"The wit, which I can well observe
To-day in our young lords; but they may jest,
Till their own scorn returns to them unnoted,
Ere they can hide their levity in honour.
So like a courtier, contempt nor bitterness
Were in his pride or sharpness; if they were,
His equal had awaked them; and his honour,
Clock to itself, knew the true minute, when
Exception bid him speak, and, at this time,
His tongue obeyed his hand:
Thus his good melancholy oft began,
On the catastrophe and heel of pastime,
When it was out.

We easily perceive that this is a picture drawn with true delight of a man of honour, who possessed, in enviable proportion, the two qualities of jest and earnest, but whose characteristics are directly opposed to those of the fashionable youths who have learned nothing but ridicule, and "whose short-lived wits", as our play says, "do wither as they grow".

In Meres' oft-mentioned list of the plays of Shakespeare, which were written previous to the year 1598, we know there was a comedy entitled "Love's Labour's Won". Hunter has long ago made the vain attempt to find this piece in "the Tempest"; recently an anonymous writer (the author of the pamphlet, Collier, Coleridge, and Shakespeare. 1860. p. 130.) has advanced the more plausible conjecture of Much Ado about Nothing, which we should feel inclined to refuse upon the very ground that it is too striking: for why should the poet have exchanged so significant a title

for one so insignificant. We shall, therefore, do well to rest upon a former supposition of Farmer's and others, that All's Well that Ends Well is the piece which in an earlier and older treatment bore that title. In a passage in the Epilogue (all is well ended, if this suit is won) both titles are, as it were, blended. The supposition is all the more probable, since all agree that the piece has evidently been remodelled, and that not only as concerns the title. Coleridge, in his lectures on Shakespeare, pointed out two distinct styles in the piece; the rhymed passages, the alternate rhymes, the sonnet-letter of Helena, point to the form which the piece probably more uniformly bore, when with its first title it was placed by the side of Love's Labour's Lost, to the style of which those passages nearly correspond. By far the greater part of the piece, however, must have undergone a complete remodelling, for the prose-scenes, the soliloquies, which in profound thought and force often call to mind Hamlet and Timon, and challenge all the interpreter's art of arrangement, punctuation, and transposition, the comic passages, which in substance and form recall the scenes of Falstaff, these evidently belong to the later period of the poet's writings; critics have supposed during the years 1605-1606. However we discuss the piece in this place, according to the time of its probable origin, and on account of the contrast, which it affords to Love's Labour's Lost, not only in form but in spirit.

In passing from the last discussed play to All's Well that Ends Well, we feel directly an outward difference and we divine an inward; we pass from the florid and exaggerated Italian style of Shakespeare's earlier period, to the popular English tone which distinguishes his later writings, and this

transition of style exactly suits the subject of this counterpart as well as its psychological treatment. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, Biron is one of those humorous characters, devoid of all sentimentality, little suited to the peculiar service of love among the circle of courtiers of Navarre, with whom love is rather a kind of subtle speculation, the offspring of idleness, carried on like a play of the fancy with sonnets and poems, which are rather the work of the head than the emotions of the heart, with concealed avowals which betrayed more wit than feeling, a love-service with method but without natural truth, of many words, but little action or tested feeling. When this actor-like wooing suffers shipwreck, Biron's truer nature returns, and he rejects that Romanic service of love and poetry with all the candour of a Saxon; he renounces

"The taffata phrases, silken terms precise,
Three-piled hyperboles, spruce affectation,
Figures pedantical";

and he protests that henceforth his

"Wooing mind shall be expressed
In russet yeas, and honest kersey noes".

In this manner has Shakespeare made his prince Henry woo, his model of unaffected nature. But in *All's Well that Ends Well*, he has delineated in Bertram a youth who like Biron is a despiser of love, but acts the part to such an extreme, that he even joins not in the coarsest wooing, but much rather must himself be wooed. The part of the wooer in the love-affairs of this piece belongs strangely enough to the woman. But, as if this play was intended to form a contrast as great and as glaring as possible to *Love's Labour's Lost*, even in her wooing, all sentimentality, affectation, and unnaturalness is avoided. She woos with tears, her

love speaks by deeds of merit, the poetry of her relation to Bertram rests in the capability for action and sacrifice of a character free from all mental sickliness. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, the lords of Navarre had a political ground for not abjuring the society of women, in mere caprice they indulged the utterly *groundless* whim of suppressing nature unnaturally. To this affected renunciation of these praise-seeking nobles, we have here the contrast of a modest womanly being, who loves her foster-brother, far removed as he is from her in rank, who has *all possible reasons* within and without her for repressing and renouncing her passion, but in whom a full healthy nature, divine power in a feeble vessel, far from setting up unnatural obstacles, pierce through all the barriers which appear so insurmountable. In harmony with this, throughout this piece, in its story and in its leading characters, all is simple nature, hearty endeavour, and action, without many words, while in the other all is affectation, poetic play, and shallow intercourse, without much action. And as in the one, the idea of the piece is again and again decidedly expressed and repeated by the loquacious characters, in the other, on the contrary, it is silently placed in the characters themselves and in the facts of the play.

In the story of the piece, only the comic parts, the characters of Parolles, Lafeu, the clown, and the countess, are the property and invention of the poet; the main pith and subject of the play is borrowed from Boccaccio's novel of *Giglietta di Nerbona*, which Shakespeare may have read in Painter's "Palace of Pleasure". The piece is the more remarkable, because we learn from it the relation of Shakespeare and his drama to his narrative models of Romanic origin, and perceive what a different power predominates in

the Saxon poet, and what increased care dramatic poetry claims, while it meets the severe criticism of the eye, compared to the narrative tales which fall under the more sparing judgment of the credulous ear.

The famous Italian novelist relates how the foster-daughter of the Count of Roussillon, the daughter of his physician, fell in love with his son Bertram; how the latter travelled to Paris; how the lover devises a plan to follow him; how the sickness of the king afforded her a pretext for this; how she cures him, and asks as a reward count Bertram for a husband, and receives him against his will; how he disdains to acknowledge her as a wife, except on two impossible conditions which he places before her. In Boccaccio's novel there is no mention of a motive for all these strange actions. Giglietta is not only beautiful but rich, and as far as this goes, there is therefore less ground for scorning her; far rather would this contempt be excited by her undue forwardness. She reflects how she may hasten after the departed lover; she has prepared a plan for obtaining him through the recovery of the king; when he places before her the conditions, she broods forthwith over the scheme of making possible the impossible. To this we listen in the narrative with dull ear, but we never could see it represented. A husband-seeking woman, who, devoid of all delicacy, made and accomplished such schemes, would become subsequently still more despised by the man who had despised her at first; upon the stage no one could take an interest in it; it would be felt as disgusting.

But Shakespeare has not made his work so easy. The manner in which he has designed the relation of the two characters in question, committing the most romantic

undertakings to a girl, who is at last, however, to appear in delicacy and morality well worthy of love, the boldness with which he meets the greatest improbabilities, accumulating difficulties in full consciousness of success, all this appears to us of extreme importance in this piece. The poet receives the story, just as it was given him. He takes it with all its romantic extravagance, to which he is as keenly alive as any one among ourselves. He has often subsequently done just the same with stories still more strange; there is a kind of poetic orthodoxy about him, by which he gets the very pith of the transmitted piece, holds it inviolable, and leaves it intact. But then with just as much disregard and freedom does he remodel the surrounding circumstances and characters according to his necessities; he gives motives to them and to their actions, so that in truth and reality they *might have done* something similar, something analogous to that which the legend assigned to them, something credible and possible to all fellow mortals. To the cold temperament the story may now appear merely as an artistic embodiment, as an arbitrary fiction, for which in prosaic interpretation any other more natural relation may be devised. To him, on the contrary, whose easily excited imagination rises above the common-places of reality, these dry reflections will not be needed. To him this will appear the wonderful quality of this genius, that he throws such a spell of nature over the most unwonted circumstances, that he makes us forget in the midst of the most romantic matter, that we are in the region of dreams and poetry.

The poet does not depict the maiden as rich, nor as overflowing with schemes and sensibility, but as poor, modest, humble, gentle, entirely resting upon her womanly

nature. Seized with love for her foster-brother, entirely filled with this one longing, she is nevertheless devoted even to resignation, "like the hind that would be mated by the lion", and must die for love. In her soliloquies she expresses not even a desire; "it hurts not him, that he is loved of her", this is her plea; Indian-like, she adores the sun, "that looks upon his worshipper, but knows of him no more". This self-denial is all the more conspicuous, when she is agitated by the violence of a genuinely strong passion, which her active imagination betrays to the listener in audible soliloquy. "'Twas pretty, though a plague", she says, "to see him every hour". But with this self-mastering, self-renouncing, modest nature, she is prudent, clever, and apt, qualities which in reality are so often united in superior women. She knows, so it is said of her, how to put "sharp stings in her mildest words". She possesses the twofold gift, not incompatible with the genuine womanliness of her character, of being at once modest and courageous, ready to endure, and prompt for action. She exhibits the quality of increasing in active decision when circumstances favour it, without forfeiting her woman's nature, even when taking steps that appear masculine. She contrives not for herself, (it is just this which in Boccaccio's tales appears so masculine and indelicate,) but she starts not back discouraged at the execution of a bold thought when suggested to her; she knows not how to create plans and projects for herself, but when fate has presented them to her, she knows how with ability to adopt them. And this not from masculine boldness, but from pious trust and a persevering, steadfast nature, which from her youth up, on account of her poor position, pointed her to selfdependence. She has read in the Bible

that "He that of greatest works is finisher, oft does them by the weakest minister", and upon this she has established the principle, that we must meet the proffered good and must use the powers we have received.

Let us attentively follow the character thus designed, through the entanglements of the knot which her own love has fastened, careful to substitute nothing which is alien to the poet and his Helena, but equally careful not to lose even the slightest touch, which he has made in her delineation. Even before she advances to action, we perceive the depth of her feeling and the innocent dissimulation which circumstances compel her to adopt. The beloved bids adieu to his home, the tears are in her eyes, she dare not show them. They burst forth when the countess praises her, whilst they are speaking of her deceased father. The mother imputes them to a remembrance of her father; Helena does not contradict her, but gives an equivocal reply; she permits herself this small sophistry, not without excusing it to herself;—her tears flow from so noble a source, that, even thus shed, they grace the remembrance of her father. Bertram departs; she is fully resigned; she has no anticipation of being able to obtain him; she lives alone on the recollection of intercourse with him. Only when the contemptible Parolles, his follower, whose way it is to be intolerably saucy even with honourable personages, annoys her with unseemly wit, when thus she is reminded of the bad society in which Bertram now enters the world, when she pictures the temptations to which he will be exposed in Paris, then jealousy is excited in her, and a pardonable weakness, not a masculine power, is the first source of the plan to follow him, to guard him from falling

into strange hands, whilst her love at home is decaying and growing old. And vaguely with these ideas does the dark thought intrude itself, whether this struggling desire could not also give her the power of attaining her object. She thinks to be able to deserve him, yet never knows how "that desert should be". Her father's prescription for the king's malady occurs to her only as a ground for the journey; but she has no presentiment of employing the cure of the king for the acquisition of the Count. This thought is suggested by the Countess, Bertram's own mother, who, discovering her love from an over-heard soliloquy, favours it, and looking back to her own youth, recognizes in herself a similar nature, and now a practical matron points out and contrives the way which leads straight to the object. Helena goes forthwith to Paris to cure the king; every sacrifice, even life, staked on this hazardous cure, is nothing to her. If we keep in view all that she, at this time, before, and later, stakes upon the man of her heart, her womanliness is exhibited in stronger light by what follows. Her manner of choice ever presents the same amiability;

"I dare not say, I take you; but I give
Me, and my service, ever whilst I live,
Into your guiding power".

Sought after by all others, even by "hearts that scorned to serve, humbly called mistress"; she is disdained by Bertram, and retires at once with her wonted resignation. But the king, in virtue of his power as liege lord and guardian of Bertram, irritated at his refusal and bent upon making him feel his distance from him as deeply as he had caused Helena to feel his own from her, compels him to the marriage; upon which she receives from Bertram the

conditions on which he will acknowledge her as his wife. She is far otherwise than the Giglietta of Boccaccio, who at once broods over a plan for fulfilling these conditions; she has lost him, and resignedly she returns home. He has written to her, that until he has no wife, he has nothing to do in France. She now hears that he has repaired to the Florentine war; she must believe he has done it on her account; but she will not be guilty of his plunging himself into danger, and for her sake avoiding home and mother. She wishes not to destroy his happiness; like a "poor thief" she steals away from the castle of her love to make a pilgrimage to Saint Jaques; then she causes them to write home that she has died there. Too great heroism for such a womanly creature, as we have considered Helena to be! The poet, therefore, tempers it with the same affectionate weakness, which prompted her first journey to Paris. She takes the way through Florence, that she may once more see him, and there fortune rewards her toil and fidelity by the accomplishment of the strangest scheme. This plan, daring but not unlawful for Bertram's lawful wife, she *devises* not for herself, but she *seizes* it with the same quick determination, as before that of the countess. There is here also nothing amazon-like, the most womanly impulse is at work, whether it be jealousy or the design of guarding her husband like his protecting angel from a sinful step. The picture is drawn of an innocent and strong love perpetually meeting with fresh hindrances, and only excited by these to fresh and greater efforts.

Thus far this strange plot might be made not only outwardly possible, but also, and this is the main point, morally so, for a noble female character, in whom we may take

warm interest. There remains a new difficulty. How is it conceivable that the beloved, the husband, can be won, not alone to a compelled union, but to actual love, after he had once disdained?

Bertram's character is placed in perfect contrast to Helena's. Throughout she appears humble, meek, modest, but perfectly mature, wise, and prudent, endowed with high aspirations and instinctively impelled to follow them. He, on the other hand, is haughty, rash, and unbridled, assuming although ill-advised, influenced by the most wretched society, and entirely devoid of judgment and reflection. The ground upon which he disdains the much-desired Helena, is, first of all, that the emotion of female love is as yet altogether foreign to him. His flattering attendant Parolles, whose purpose the married Bertram serves not, prejudices him systematically against these emotions; he had once also regarded a daughter of Lafeu's only through the "scornful perspective" of contempt. Before the king, he alleges his ancestry and the difference of rank as the ground of his disdain. Here lies the moral centre of the piece and the main difference between the two characters. As the heroes in *Love's Labour's Lost* suffer from the conceit of seeming virtue, so does this one from the vanity of seeming merit. This difference of blood and rank has no importance for Helena; her strong nature is never master over custom, but is everywhere struggling against mere custom and conventionality. If she could only have seen how she could deserve Bertram; that she *can* deserve him, she doubts not. Her noble mind suggests that,

"The mightiest space in fortune, nature brings
To join like likes, and kiss like native things".

Full of this self-reliance, she gives free course to her love, and fears not the difficulties of the path. In this, the Countess, Bertram's mother, meets her. She has perfect congeniality of soul with Helena, she looks back upon similar experiences in her own youth, when she too "did wish chastely and love dearly", and, as Helena says, "Dian was both herself and love". With the interest of personal sympathy, she regards this strong passion, which seems to her to bear "the show and seal of nature's truth" and she gives her maternal favour to the poor foster-child against the haughty son, whose name she washes out of her blood. But what this affection signifies, we first feel when we have seen the thoroughly aristocratic bearing of the lady in that scene (Act III. sc. 2), in which she receives the intelligence that her son has rejected Helena. Amid all the disquietude which the wretched intelligence causes her, amid the grief of the parent, the sympathy of the foster-mother and of the woman, she yet preserves the dignity of the housewife and hostess, in the proud restraining of her emotion; she has "felt so many quirks of joy, and grief, that the first face of neither, on the start, can woman her unto't". Thus as the heroine of the piece in consequence of her position, the Countess in consequence of her experience and principles, the valiant old lord Lafew is also raised above the prejudice of distinction of rank, and places virtue and merit before nobility and blood; once indeed he himself raised a claim for Bertram in behalf of his daughter. Nay even the highest representative of all dignity of rank, the king himself, takes the same exalted view, and this may be traced with him to the threatening nearness of the grave, upon the brink of which he had stood. "Strange is it", he says,

"that our bloods,
 Of colour, weight, and heat, pour'd all together,
 Would quite confound distinction, yet stand off
 In differences so mighty:
 From lowest place when virtuous things proceed,
 The place is dignified by the doer's deed:
 Where great additions swell, and virtue none,
 It is a dropsied honour: good alone
 Is good, without a name; vileness is so.
 Honours best thrive,
 When rather from our acts we them derive,
 Than our foregoers".

Thus then, all the characters of the piece are, on this point, opposed to Bertram; even the comic character, the clown Lavatch, is in the way of caricature presented under the same aspect, since he is at first encumbered with a foolish passion which must end in beggary. That, therefore, appears untrue, which Ulrichi states, that some characters had no reference to the main idea of the piece. For even to this ruling principle may be traced the character of Diana, who sets aside the sensitive pride of a poor family, of a womanly nature, for the only thing which she possesses, her stainless honour, whilst for a virtuous object she engages in an ever painful project.

The idea, that merit goes before rank, has, as we shall presently see, expressly occupied Shakespeare's mind in the period before us. It is the soul of this piece and of the relation between Bertram and Helena. If then haughtiness of spirit and youthful pride in his liberty, added to arrogance of rank, were the grounds for Helena's rejection by Bertram, it would be asked, how the poet removed these inner hindrances to the union, after circumstances have set aside the outer and have joined the pair in the outward form of marriage. The masterly manner, in which this is done,

rivals that, with which he has solved the other half of this moral knot.

The nobility of a fine nature is innate in Bertram, his degeneracy into pride is only youthful error. His mother calls him "an unseasoned courtier", "a well-derived nature", corrupted by seducement. The good qualities of his nature even facilitate this temptation. His outward appearance, a youth with curled hair, arched brows, and hawking eye, who, as the clown depicts him, "will look upon his boot, and sing; mend the ruff, and sing; pick his teeth, and sing", proclaims a smart nature, which at the same time is much occupied with itself, and has little feeling left for others. No inner mental life has yet penetrated his years of churlishness. He is far from all the wit of a Biron, far from the culture of that king of Navarre, far from the sensibility of a Dumain; entirely a man of Biron's honest kersey yeas and noes, but without Biron's refinement and wit; laconic, as Shakespeare never again maintained any principal character; in his letters just as characteristically short and compact. This rough, abrupt, uncourtly vein bursts forth into ebullitions of defiance, when he is excited. Full of youthful zeal, his whole soul is given to action and fame; at the court of the king he is angry, because he is detained from the Florentine war; twice he cannot ask, he will steal away. Now follows Helena's choice, and crosses the one thought that filled his soul. He had in his youthful moods never yet dreamt of love; at this moment he feels love for no one in the world; that he is *commanded* to take this wife, this above all provokes his resentment. In this passion, we must observe, and not in cold sophistry, he not only prescribes to Helena those conditions, which stipulate, as it

were, for his freest choice after the compulsory marriage just concluded, but he even purposes to defy the king by letter. If any thing is wanting to retain in him this hardened feeling of resentment, the base flatterer Parolles is there, who holds him ensnared, who wishes to keep him free and open to his own parasitical arts, who hates Helena and is active in placing her in a hateful aspect. The curse of the king who threatens to "throw" his refractory subject "into the careless lapse of youth and ignorance", is fulfilled; the connection of the unwary Bertram with this same Parolles, this Armado in arms, exhibits his entire destitution of counsel and advice. As a braggart, a liar, a fop, a wretched man, "who hath outvillained villainy so far, that the rarity redeems him", as a seducer of youth, a meagre Falstaff, who also entangles Bertram in Florence into the immoral intercourse with Diana, this braggart is known to all, except to Bertram; "a window of lattice", easily to be seen through, he is called by Lafeu, who warns Bertram plainly and decidedly of him, but in vain; the clown calls him "a very little of nothing", but to Bertram he was everything; Helena appears to him too low for a wife, but this man seems equal for a friend; the straightforward open youth "could endure anything before but a cat", and just under the yoke of this parasite he lies ensnared, and his unsuspecting soul divines not what he is. At Florence he appears most glaringly in his cloven nature, good and bad, brave and glorious, but at the same time dissolute and corrupt, sunk into the habits of a debauchee. At the turning point of the piece we see him in a whirlpool of activity, and seized with thorough confusion of mind and manner. In the act of leaving Florence, he despatches "sixteen businesses, by an abstract of success"; in his familiar

fashion, he takes leave of the duke in the street; he prepares for the journey; he writes to his mother; he has agreed upon a meeting with Diana; he has given to her, a frivolous woman, (as he must deem her) the ring, the same ring, to obtain which he had imposed upon Helena an impossible task, the family-ring upon which, as it were, the honour of his house rested. Overwhelmed with passion he has, in doing so, lost the right to urge his family and rank further against Helena. He now receives the tidings of Helena's death. When he reads the letter, he is "changed almost into another man"; he begins to love her when he learns her death; how should that heart, which had broken for his sake, leave his unmoved? He buries her not only in his thoughts, but deploras her. And to make his sudden change the more emphatic: he had sworn to Diana to marry her, when his wife was dead; it must torment him to think, how much more free his conscience would be, if the rejection of Helena had never brought him into this position. Nevertheless he does not relinquish the meeting with Diana; and even more, not only from sorrow does he plunge into the intoxication of his senses, but from this he passes to the ludicrous scene, which is to unmask to him his friend Parolles. In a state of inward confusion, he thus seeks to drown the voice of conscience; for the discovery concerning Parolles must have opened to him before everything his own helpless immaturity, and have made him look repentantly within. This humiliation of soul is to follow his outward abasement stroke by stroke; he is to learn thoroughly to mortify his arrogance and to suspect his pride. The death of Helena, the peace at Florence, the duke's letter to the king, explain his return to court. There he is convicted of

having given his ring to a worthless woman, his guilt is exposed, and he is scorned by Lafeu, whose daughter he should have married; he incurs the disregard of all, and is even suspected of having murdered Helena. His riddles, his ring, the torments which he had created by it, recoil avengingly upon himself. Thus humbled and depressed, he is freed not only from a burdensome marriage, but what is still more, from a fearful burden of conscience; must he not regard the woman, who brought him this sacrifice, as the beneficent guardian spirit who should best counsel him through life? He stands before her, the proud man of rank, whose noble birth has gained him no virtue, who had wantonly hazarded at once nobility and virtue, he stands before *her* who was ennobled by virtue, and had saved him the symbol of *his* nobility. Like a man out of the class of aspiring innovators, of whom Bacon says, that in comparison to their activity "nobles appear like statues", she, wooing by actions, has conquered the man of her love; yet is she steadfast, even after conditions executed and rights won, in her womanly nature, in her old humble ways, in her calm resignation. This wholly softens in him all that in his inflexible nature was yet unmelted. When still in fear and suspense she utters the painful words, "'Tis but the name and not the thing", — not his wife, — he, in his laconic way, compresses all repentance, all contrition, all gratitude and love, into the words: "Both, both; O pardon!" and it requires only the actor who knows how to prepare for these words, to utter and to accompany them with suitable action, to leave the spectator no room for anxiety as to the future of the pair.

In few pieces do we feel so much as in *All's Well* that

Ends Well, what excessive scope the poet leaves open to the actor's art. Few readers, and still fewer female readers, will believe in Helena's womanly nature, even after they have read our explanations and have found them indisputable. The subject has at once repelled them; and so far would we gladly make allowance for this feeling, that we grant, that Shakespeare might better have bestowed his psychological art upon more agreeable matter, and that he has often done so. But even he who, by the aid of our remarks, will have overcome his repugnance to the matter, will seldom find in himself the standard by which to judge it possible that such bold and masculine steps could be taken in a thoroughly feminine manner. Only by seeing it and by trusting the eye, can we be sensible of the full and harmonious effect of this work of art. But that even the eye may be convinced, a great actress is required. Bertram also demands a great performer, if the spectator is to perceive that this is a man capable of rewarding efforts so great on the part of a woman, whose painful wooing promises a grateful possession. That this unsentimental youth has a heart, this corrupted libertine a good heart, that this scorner can ever love the scorned, this is indeed *read* in his scanty words, but few readers of the present day are free enough from sentimentality to believe such things on the credit of so few words. Entirely otherwise would it be, when they *see* in the acted Bertram, the noble nature, the ruin of his character at Florence, the contrition which his sins and his simplicity call forth, when, from the whole bearing of the brusque man, they perceive what the one word "pardon" signified in his mouth, when they see his breast heave at the last appearance of Helena bringing ease to his con-

science; then would they give credence to his last words; for the great change in his nature, of which they now only read a forlorn word and overlook it, they would then have witnessed. Seldom has the art of the actor had a task so absolute, as in the character of Bertram, but still more seldom is the actor to be found, who knows how to execute it. For Richard Burbadge this part must have been a dainty feast. About the time when it received this last form (1605—8), Shakespeare had prepared for him also Pericles and Petruchio, as equally attractive tasks. Arrived at the height of their productions, both appear at that time to delight in craving and affording these faint sketches of character, as if for the sake of practising their mutual work, of drawing outlines and finishing them, or supplying riddles and solving them.

MIDSUMMER - NIGHT'S DREAM.

If *All's Well that Ends Well* be read immediately between *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, we feel how in the one the matured hand of the poet was at work, while between the two other pieces there exists a closer connection. The mere performance of the comic plays by the clowns affords a resemblance between the two pieces, but still more so the mode of diction. Apart from the fairy songs, in which Shakespeare, in a masterly manner, preserves the popular tone of the style which existed before him, the piece bears prominently the stamp of the Italian school. The language, picturesque, descriptive, and florid with conceits, the too apparent alliterations, the doggerel passages which extend over the passionate and impressive scenes, the old mythology well suited to the subject, all this places the piece in a close, or at least not remote, relation to *Love's Labour's Lost*. As in this play, the story, the original combination of the figures of ancient, religious, and historical legends with beings of the popular Saxon myths, is the property and invention of the poet. As in *Love's Labour's Lost*, utterly unlike what we have just seen of characteristic touches in *All's Well that Ends Well*, the

acting characters are separated from each other only by a very general outline; there is a stronger distinction between the little, pert Hermia, shrewish and irritable even at school, and the slender, yielding Helena, distrustful and reproachful of herself; and a fainter one between the upright, open Lysander and the somewhat malicious and inconstant Demetrius. The period of the origin of the piece, which like *Henry VIII.* and the *Tempest* may have been written in honour of the nuptials of some noble couple, is placed at about 1594 or 1596. The marriage of Theseus is the turning point of the action of the piece, which unites the clowns, the fairies, and the common race of men. ¶ The piece is a masque, one of those dramas for special occasions, appointed for private representation, which Ben Jonson especially brought to perfection. In England, this species of drama has as little a law of its own as the historical drama; compared to the ordinary drama, it exhibits, according to Halpin, an insensible transition, undistinguishable by definition. As in the historical drama, almost every mark of distinction from the free drama arises from the nature and the mass of the matter, in the masque, it proceeds from the occasion of its origin, from its prescribed reference to it, and from the allegorical elements which are here introduced. These latter, it must be admitted, have given quite a peculiar stamp to the *Midsummer-Night's Dream* among the rest of Shakespeare's works. ¶

Upon the most superficial reading, we perceive that the actions in the *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, still more than the characters themselves, are treated quite differently to those in other plays of Shakespeare. The great art of an underlying motive, his true magic wand, the poet has here

quite laid aside. Instead of reasonable inducements, instead of natural impulses flowing from character and circumstance, caprice is master here. We meet with a double pair, who are entangled in strange mistakes, the motives to which we, however, seek for in vain in the nature of the actors themselves. Demetrius, like Proteus in the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, has left a bride and woos, like Proteus, the bride of his friend. This Lysander has fled with Hermia to seek a spot, where the law of Athens cannot pursue them. Secretly, the piece tells us, they both steal away into the wood, Demetrius in fury follows them, and for love Helena fastens herself like a burr upon the heels of the latter. In common lack of conscience, Hermia sins at first through want of due obedience to her father, and Demetrius through faithlessness to his betrothed Helena, Helena through treachery to her friend Hermia, and Lysander through mockery of his father-in-law. The strife in the first act, in which we cannot trace any clear moral motives, is in the third act changed into a perfect confusion by influences of an entirely external character. In the fairy world a similar disorder reigns between Oberon and Titania. The play of the respectable citizens of Pyramus and Thisbe forms to the tragic-comic point of the plot a comic-tragic counterpart, of two lovers, who behind their parents' backs "think no scorn to woo by moonlight", and through a mere accident come to a tragic end.

It is, we see, a play of amorous caprices, which impel the human beings in the main plot of the piece; Demetrius is betrothed, then Helena pleases him no longer, he trifles with Hermia, and at the close he remembers this breach of faith only as youthful playfulness. Outward

powers and not inward impulses and nature appear to have put this humour in motion. At first it is the warm season, the first night in May, the ghost-hour of the mystic powers, which heats the brain, for even elsewhere Shakespeare occasionally calls a piece of folly, the madness of a midsummer-day, a dog-day's fever, and in the 98th sonnet he speaks of April as the time which puts "the spirit of youth in everything", making even the "heavy Saturn laugh and leap with him". Then it is the power of Cupid who appears in the back-ground of the piece as a real character, who misleads the judgment and blinds the eyes, delighting in frivolous breach of faith. And last of all we see the lovers completely in the hand of the fairies, who ensnare their senses, and bring them into that tumult of confusion, the unravelling of which, like the entanglement itself, is to come from without. These delusions of blind passion, this jugglery of the senses during the sleep of reason, these changes of mind and errors of "seething brains", these actions without the higher centre of a mental and moral bearing, these are compared, as it were, to a dream, which unrolls before us with its fearful complications, from which there is no deliverance but in awaking and in the recovery of consciousness.

The piece is called a *Midsummer-Night's Dream*; the Epilogue expresses satisfaction, if the spectator will regard the piece as a dream; as in a dream, time and locality are obliterated; a certain twilight and dusk is spread over the whole; Oberon desires that all shall regard the matter as a dream, and so it is. Titania speaks of her adventure as a vision, Bottom of his metamorphosis as a dream, all the rest awake at last out of a sleep of weariness, and the events leave

upon them the impression of a dream. The sober Theseus esteems their stories as nothing else than dreams and fantasies. Indeed these allusions in the piece must have suggested to Coleridge and others the idea that the poet had intentionally aimed at letting the piece glide by as a dream. We only wonder that with this opinion, they have not reached the inner kernel in which this purpose of the poet really lies enshrined, a purpose, which has not only given a name to the piece, but has called forth as by magic a free poetic creation of the greatest value. For it is indeed to be expected from our poet, that such an intention on his side were not to be sought for in the mere shell. If this intention were only realized in those poetical externals, in that fragrant charm of rhythm and verse, that harassing suspense, that dusky twilight, then this were but the shallow work of an outward dexterity with which a poet like Shakespeare would have never dreamt of accomplishing anything worth the while.

Let us revert to our first examination of the piece and its contents, and taking a higher, more commanding view, let us seek actually to reach that aim, which Coleridge in truth only divined. We mentioned then, that the play of amorous humour proceeded from no inner impulse of the soul, but from outer powers, from the influence of gods and fairies, among whom Cupid, the demon of the old mythology, only appears behind the scenes, while, on the other hand, the spirits of later superstition, the fairies, occupy the main place upon the stage. If we look at the functions which the poet has committed to both, to the god of love and to the fairies, we find to our surprise, that they are perfectly similar. The workings of each upon the passions of men are the same. The infidelity of Theseus towards his many for-

saken ones, Ariadne, Æglé, Antiopa, and Perigenia, which we, according to the ancient myth, would ascribe to Cupid, to the intoxication of sensuous love, are imputed in the *Midsommer-Night's Dream* to the elfin king. Even before the fairies appear in the piece, Demetrius is prompted by the infatuation of blind Love, and Puck expressly says that not he but Cupid originated this madness of mortals; as may be inferred also with Titania and the boy. The fairies then pursue these errors still further, in the same manner as Cupid had begun them; they increase and heal them; one means, the juice of a flower, Dian's bud, is to cure the perplexities of love in both Lysander and Titania; the juice of another flower (Cupid's) had caused them. This latter flower had received the wondrous power from a wound by Cupid's shaft. The power conveyed by the shaft, was perceived by the elfin-king, who knew how to use it; Oberon is closely initiated into the deepest secrets of the Love-God, but not so his servant Puck.

The famous passage, in which Oberon orders Puck to fetch him this herb with its ensnaring charm, is as follows:

“My gentle Puck, come hither; Thou remember'st
 Since once I sat upon a promontory,
 And heard a mermaid, on a dolphin's back,
 Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath,
 That the rude sea grew civil at her song;
 And certain stars shot madly from their spheres,
 To hear the sea-maid's musick.
 That very time I saw (*but thou could'st not*)
 Flying between the cold moon and the earth,
 Cupid all arm'd: a certain aim he took
 At a fair vestal, throned by the west;
 And loosed his love-shaft smartly from his bow,
 As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts:
 But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft

Quenched in the chaste beams of the wat'ry moon;
 And the imperial vot'ress passed on,
 In maiden meditation, fancy-free.
 Yet marked I where the bolt of Cupid fell:
 It fell upon a little western flower, —
 Before milk-white; now purple with Love's wound, —
 And maidens call it love-in-idleness.
 Fetch me that flower".

This passage has recently in the writings of the Shakespeare-society received an interpretation full of spirit by Halpin (Oberon's vision), which evidences to us that in this poet scarcely too much can be sought for, that even in the highest flight of his imagination, he never leaves the ground of reality, and that in every touch, however episodic it may appear, he ever inserts the profoundest allusions to his main subject. We know well, that in the eyes of the dry critic, this explanation, which has, however, one firm support of fact, has found little favour; to us this is not very conceivable: since every new and old investigation has long ago proved, how readily this realistic poet sought, in the smallest allusions as well as in the greatest designs, lively relations to the times and places round him, how in his freest tragic creations he loved to refer to historical circumstances, aye, founded even the most foolish speeches and actions of his clowns, of his grave-diggers in Hamlet, or his patrols in Much Ado about Nothing, upon actual circumstances, and just by this gave them that value of indisputable truth to nature, which distinguishes them so palpably beyond all other caricatures. How should he not naturally have been impelled, to give to just such a sweet allegory as this, the firmest possible basis of fact? To us, therefore, Halpin's interpretation of this passage is all the more unquestionable, as it gives the most definite relation to the innermost sense

of the whole piece. We must, therefore, before we proceed further, first consider more narrowly this episodical narrative, and its bearing upon the fundamental idea of the *Midsummer-Night's Dream*.

It has always been agreed that by the Vestal, throned by the west, from whom Cupid's shaft glided off, Queen Elizabeth was intended, and the whole passage was in consequence esteemed as a delicate flattery of the maiden queen. But we see at once by this instance, that Shakespeare, extraordinary in this respect as in every other, knew how to make his courtly flatteries, of which he was on all occasions most sparing, subservient, by deeper poetic or moral bearings, to the æsthetic or moral aims of his poetry. It was thus with this passage, which has now received a much extended interpretation. Cupid "all armed" is referred to the Earl of Leicester's wooing of Elizabeth and to his great preparations at Kenilworth for this end (1575). From descriptions of these festivities, (Gascoyne's *Princely Pleasures*. 1576, and Laneham's Letter, 1575) we know, that at the spectacles and fireworks which enlivened those rejoicings, a singing mermaid played a part, who swam upon a dolphin's back upon a smooth water, amid shooting stars; thus then the characteristics agree with those, which Oberon specifies to Puck. The arrow, aimed at the priestess of Diana, whose bud possesses the power of quenching love, and which has such force over Cupid's flower, rebounded. By the flower, upon which it fell wounding, the Countess Lettice of Essex is understood by Halpin, with whom Leicester carried on a clandestine intercourse, while her husband was absent in Ireland, who, apprized of the matter, returned in 1576, and was poisoned on the journey. The flower was milk-white,

innocent, but purple with love's wound, which denoted her fall, or the deeper blush of her husband's murder. The name is "love in idleness", which Halpin refers to the listlessness of her heart during the absence of her husband; for on other occasions also, Shakespeare uses this popular denomination of the pansy, to denote a love which surprises and affects men in indolence, unarmed, and devoid of all other feeling and aspiration. While Oberon declares to Puck that he marked the adventure, which the servant could not, the poet appears to denote the strict mystery which concealed this affair, and which might be known to him, because, as we remember, the execution of his maternal relative Edward Arden (1583) was closely connected with it, and because the famous Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, the favourite of Elizabeth and subsequently the victim of her displeasure, a son of that Lettice, was early a patron and protector of Shakespeare.

How significant then does this little allegorical episode become, which, regarded only as a poetic ornament, is full of grace and beauty! Whilst Spenser at that very time had extolled Elizabeth as the "fairy queen", Shakespeare, on the contrary, places her as a being, unapproachable rather by this world of fancy. His courtesy to the queen is transformed into a very serious meaning: for contrasting with this insanity of love, emphasis is placed upon the other extreme, the victory of Diana over Cupid, of the mind over the body, of maiden contemplativeness over the jugglery of love; and even in other passages of the piece, those are extolled as "thrice blessed, that master so their blood, to undergo such maiden pilgrimage". But with regard to the bearing of the passage upon the actual purport of the Mid-

summer-Night's Dream, the poet carries back the mind to a circumstance in real life, which, like an integral part, lies in close parallel with the story of the piece. More criminal, more dissolute acts prompted by the blind passion of love, were at that time committed in reality, than were ever represented in the drama. The ensnaring charm, embodied in a flower, has an effect upon the entanglements of the lovers in the play. And what this representation might lack in probability and psychological completeness, (for the sweet allegory of the poet was not to be overburdened with too much of the prose of characterization) the spectator with poetic faith may explain by the magic sap of the flower, or with pragmatic soberness may interpret by analogy with the actual circumstance which the poet has converted into this exquisite allegory.

But it is time that we should return from this digression. We have said before, that the piece appears designed to be treated as a dream; not merely in outer form and colour, but also in inner signification. The errors of that blind intoxication of the senses, which form the main point of the piece, appear to us to be an allegorical picture of the errors of a life of dreams. Reason and consciousness are cast aside in that intoxicating passion as in a dream; Cupid's delight in breach of faith, Jove's merriment at the perjury of the lovers, causes the actions of those, who are in the power of the god of love, to appear almost as unaccountable as the sins which we commit in a dream. We have further discovered that the actions and occupations of Cupid and of the fairies throughout the piece are interwoven or alternate. And this appears to us to confirm most forcibly the design of the poet to compare allegorically the sensuous life of love with a

dream-life; the exchange of functions between Cupid and the fairies is therefore the true poetic embodiment of this comparison. For to Shakespeare's fairies is the realm of dreams assigned; they are essentially nothing else than personified dream-gods, children of the fancy, which not alone, as Mercutio says, is the vain producer of dreams, but also of the caprices of superficial love.

Vaguely as in a dream, this significance of the fairies rests in the ancient popular belief itself of the Germanic races, and Shakespeare has for a moment, with the instinctive touch of genius, fashioned this idea into exquisite form. In German "*Alp*" and "*Elfe*" is the same word; by "*Alp*", the people in Germany everywhere understand a dream-goblin (night-mare). The name of the fairy king Oberon is only frenchified from Alberon or Alberich, a dwarfish elf, who early appears in old German poems. The character of Puck, or as he is properly called Robin Goodfellow, is literally no other, than our own "*guter Knecht Ruprecht*"; and it is curious, that from this name in German the word "*Rüpel*" is derived, the only one by which we can give the idea of the English *clown*, the very part which, in Shakespeare, Puck plays in the kingdom of the fairies. This belief in fairies was far more diffused through Scandinavia than through England, and again in Scotland and England far more actively developed, than in Germany. Robin Goodfellow especially, mentioned in England as early as the 13th century, was a favourite among the popular traditions, to whose name all the cunning tricks were imputed, which we relate of Eulenspiegel and other nations of others. His "*Mad Pranks and Merry Jests*" were printed in 1628 in a popular book, which Thoms has recently prepared for his little blue

library; Collier places the origin of the book at least forty years earlier, so that Shakespeare might have been acquainted with it. Unquestionably this is the main source of his fairy kingdom; the lyric parts of the *Midsummer-Night's Dream* are in tone and colour a perfect imitation of the songs contained in it. In this popular book, Robin appears, although only in a passing manner, as the sender of the dreams; Oberon, who is here his father, and the fairies, speak to him by dreams before he is received into their community. But that which Shakespeare thus received in the rough form of fragmentary popular belief, he developed in his playful creation into a beautiful and regulated world. He here in a measure deserves the merit which Herodotus ascribes to Homer; as the greek poet has created the great abode of the gods and its olympic inhabitants, so Shakespeare has given form and place to the fairy kingdom, and with the natural creative power of genius, he has breathed soul into his merry little citizens, which imparts a living centre to their nature and their office, their behaviour and their doings. He has given embodied form to the invisible and life to the dead, and has thus striven for the poet's greatest glory; and it seems that not without consciousness of this his work, he wrote in the high strain of self-reliance that passage, in this very piece: —

“The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.
Such tricks hath strong imagination;
That, if it would but apprehend some joy,
It comprehends some bringer of that joy”.

This he has here effected ; he has clothed in bodily form those intangible phantoms, the bringers of dreams of provoking jugglery, of sweet soothing, and of tormenting raillery ; and the task he has thus accomplished we shall only rightly estimate, when we have taken into account the severe design and inner congruity of this little world.

If it were Shakespeare's object, expressly to remove from the fairies that dark ghost-like character (Act III. sc. 2.), in which they appeared in Scandinavian and Scottish fable, if it were his desire to portray them as kindly beings in a merry, harmless relation to mortals, if he wished, in their essential office as bringers of dreams, to fashion them in their nature as personified dreams, he carried out this object in wonderful harmony both as regards their actions and their condition. The kingdom of the fairy beings is placed in the aromatic flower-scented Indies, in the land where mortals live in a half-dreamy state. From hence they come, "following darkness", as Puck says, "like a dream". Airy and swift, like the moon, they circle the earth, they avoid the sunlight without fearing it and seek the darkness, they love the moon and dance in her beams, and above all they delight in the dusk and twilight, the very season for dreams, whether waking or asleep. They send and bring dreams to mortals ; and we need only remember the description of the fairies' midwife, Queen Mab, in *Romeo and Juliet*, a piece nearly of the same date with the *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, to discover, that this is the charge essentially assigned to them, and the very means by which they influence mortals. Full of deep thought is it then, how Shakespeare has fashioned their inner character in harmony with this outer function. He depicts them as beings without delicate feeling and

without morality, just as in dreams we meet not with the check of tender sensations and are without moral impulse and responsibility. Careless and unscrupulous, they tempt mortals to infidelity; the effects of the mistakes, which they have contrived, make no impression on their minds; they feel no sympathy for the deep affliction of the lovers, but only delight and marvel over their mistakes and their foolish demeanour. The poet further depicts his fairies as beings of no high intellectual development. Whoever attentively reads their parts, will find that nowhere is reflection imparted to them. Only in one exception does Puck make a sententious remark upon the infidelity of man, and whoever has penetrated into the nature of these beings, will immediately feel that it is out of harmony. Directly; they can make no inward impression upon mortals; their influence over the mind is not spiritual, but throughout material, effected by means of vision, metamorphosis, and imitation. Titania has no spiritual association with her friend, but mere delight in her beauty; her "swimming gait", and her powers of imitation. When she awakes from her vision, there is no reflection: "Methought I was enamoured of an ass", she says; "O how mine eyes do hate this visage now!" she is only affected by the idea of the actual and the visible. There is no scene of reconciliation with her husband; her resentment consists in separation, her reconciliation in a dance; there is no trace of a reflection, no indication of feeling. Thus to remind Puck of a past event, no abstract date sufficed, but an accompanying indication, perceptible to the senses, was required. They are represented, these little gods, as natural souls, without the higher human capacities of mind, lords of a kingdom not of reason and morality,

but of imagination and ideas conveyed by the senses; and thus they are uniformly the vehicle of the fancy, which produces the delusions of love and dreams. Their will, therefore, only extends to the corporeal. They lead a luxurious, merry life, given up to the pleasure of the senses; the secrets of nature, the powers of flowers and herbs are confided to them. To sleep in flowers, lulled with dances and songs, with the wings of painted butterflies to fan the moonbeams from their eyes, this is their pleasure; the gorgeous apparel of flowers and dewdrops are their joy; when Titania wishes to allure her beloved, she offers him honey, apricocks, purple grapes, and dancing. This life of sense and nature, they season, by the power of fancy, with delight in, and desires after all that is most choice, most beautiful, and agreeable. They harmonize with nightingales and butterflies; they wage war with all ugly creatures, with hedge-hogs, spiders, and bats; dancing, play, and song are their greatest pleasures; they steal lovely children, and substitute changelings; they torment decrepit old age, toothless gossips, aunts, and the awkward company of the players of Pyramus and Thisbe, but they love and recompense all that is clean and pretty. Thus was it of old in the popular traditions; the characteristic trait that they favour honesty among mortals and persecute crime, Shakespeare certainly borrowed from them in the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, but not in this piece. The sense of the beautiful is the one thing which elevates the fairies not only above the beasts, but also above the low mortal, when he is devoid of all fancy and uninfluenced by beauty. Thus in the spirit of the fairies, in which this sense of the beautiful is so refined, it is intensely ludicrous, that the elegant Titania should fall in love with an ass's head

The only pain which agitates these beings, is jealousy, the desire of possessing the beautiful sooner than others; they shun the distorting quarrel; their steadfast aim and longing is for undisturbed enjoyment. But in this sweet jugglery they neither appear constant to mortals, nor do they carry on intercourse among themselves in monotonous harmony. They are full also of wanton tricks and railleries, playing upon themselves and upon mortals, pranks which never hurt but which often torment. This is especially the property of Puck, who "jests to Oberon", who is the "lob" at this court, a coarser goblin, represented with broom or threshing flail, in a leathern dress and with a dark countenance, a roguish but awkward fellow, skilful at all transformations, practised in wilful tricks, but also clumsy enough to make mistakes and blunders contrary to his intention.

We mortals are unable to form anything out of the richest treasure of the imagination, which we have not learned from actual human circumstances and qualities. So even in this case, it is not difficult to discover in society the types of human nature which Shakespeare deemed especially suitable as the original of his fairies. There are, particularly among women of the middle and upper ranks, such natures, which are not accessible to higher spiritual necessities, who take their way through life with no serious and profound reference to the principles of morality or to intellectual objects, but who have a decided inclination and qualification for all that is beautiful, agreeable, and graceful, without even in this province being able to reach the higher attainments of art. They grasp this tangible world, as occasion offers, with ingenious designs; they are ready, dexterous, disposed for tricks and raillery, ever skilful at acting parts,

at assuming appearances, at disguises and deceptions, because they seek to season life only with festivities, pleasures, sport, and jest. These light, agreeable, rallying and sylph-like natures, which live from day to day, and have no spiritual consciousness of a common object in life, whose existence may be a playful dream full of single charms, full of grace and embellishment, but never a life of higher aim, these has Shakespeare chosen with singular tact as the originals, from whose fixed characteristics he gave form and life to his airy fairies.

| We can now readily perceive, why, in this work, the "rude mechanicals" and clowns, the company of actors with their burlesque piece, are placed in such rough contrast to the tender and delicate play of the fairies. The contrast of the material and the clumsy to the ærial, of the awkward to the beautiful, of the utterly unimaginative to that which, itself fancy, is entirely woven out of fancy, this contrast gives prominence to both. The play acted by the clowns is, as it were, the reverse of the poet's own work, which demands all the spectator's reflective and imitative fancy to open to him this ærial world, whilst in the other nothing at all is left to the imagination of the spectator. The homely mechanics, who compose and act merely for gain, for the sake of so many pence a-day, the ignorant players with hard hands and thick heads, whose unskilful art consists in learning their parts by heart, these men believe themselves obliged to represent Moon and Moonshine by words, that all may be evident, they exhibit the side-scenes by persons, and that which should take place behind the scenes, they explain by digressions. These rude doings, the fairy chiefs disturb with their utmost raillery, and the fantastical

company of lovers mock at the performance. Theseus, however, is placed between these contrasts in quiet and thoughtful contemplation. He draws back incredulous from the too-strange fables of love and its witchcraft; he enjoys that imagination should amend the play of the clowns, devoid, as it is, of all fancy. The real, that in this work of art has become "nothing", and the ideal nothing, which in the poet's hand has assumed this graceful form, are contrasted in the two extremes; in the centre is the intellectual man, who participates in both, who regards the one, the stories of the lovers, the poets by nature, as art and poetry, and who receives the other, presented as art, only as a thankworthy readiness to serve and as a simple offering. |

It is the combination of these skilfully obtained contrasts into a whole, which we especially admire in this work; the age subsequent to Shakespeare could not tolerate it, and divided it in twain. Thus sundered, this æsthetic fairy poetry and the burlesque caricature of the poet have made their own way. Yet in 1631, the *Midsummer-Night's Dream* appears to have been represented in its perfect form; we know that in this year it was acted at the Bishop of Lincoln's house on a Sunday, and that on this account a puritan tribunal sentenced Bottom to sit for 12 hours in the porter's room belonging to the bishop's palace, wearing his ass's head. But even still in the 17th century, "the merry conceited humours of Bottom the weaver" were acted as a separate burlesque. The work was attributed to the actor Robert Cox, who in the times of the civil wars, when the theatres were suppressed, wandered over the country, and under cover of rope-dancing, provided the people thus depressed by religious hypocrisy, with the enjoyment of small

exhibitions, which he himself composed under the significant name of "drolls", in which the stage returned, as it were, to the merry interludes of old. In the form, in which Cox at this time produced the farce of Bottom, it was subsequently transplanted to Germany by our own Andreas Gryphius, the schoolmaster and pedant Squenz being the chief character. How expressive these burlesque parts of the piece must have been to the public in Shakespeare's time, who were acquainted with original drolleries of this kind, *we* now can scarcely imagine. Nor do we any longer understand how to perform them; the public at that time, on the contrary, had the types of the caricatured pageants in this play and in *Love's Labour's Lost*, still existing among them.

On the other hand, Shakespeare's fairy world became the source of a complete fairy literature. The kingdom of the fairies had indeed appeared, in the chivalric epics, many centuries before Shakespeare. The oldest welsh tales and romances relate of the contact of mortals with this invisible world. The English of Shakespeare's time could read a romance of this style, of *Launfall*, in a translation from the French. The romance of "*Huon of Bordeaux*" had been earlier (in 1570) translated by Lord Berners into English. From it or from the popular book of *Robin Goodfellow*, Shakespeare could have borrowed the name of Oberon. From the reading of Ovid he has probably given to the fairy queen the name of Titania, while among his contemporaries and even by Shakespeare, in the *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, she is called "*Queen Mab*". In those old chivalric romances, in Chaucer, in Spenser's allegorical *Fairy Queen*, the fairies are utterly different beings, without distinct character or office; they concur with the whole world of

chivalry in the same monotonous description and want of character. But for Shakespeare, the Saxon fairy legends afforded a hold for renouncing the romantic art of the pastoral poets and for passing over to the rude popular taste of his fellow-countrymen. He could learn melodious language, descriptive art, the brilliancy of romantic pictures, and the sweetness of visionary images, from Spenser's *Fairy Queen*; but he rejected his proud, assuming, romantic devices from this fairy world, and grasped at the little pranks of *Robin Goodfellow*, where the simple faith of the people rested in pure and unassuming form. Just the same in Germany at the restoration of popular life at the time of the Reformation, the chivalric and romantic notions of the world of spirits were cast aside, they went back to popular belief, and we read nothing which reminds us so much of Shakespeare's fairy world, as the theory of elementary spirits by our own Paracelsus. From this time, when Shakespeare adopted the mysterious ideas of this mythology and the homely expression of them in prose and verse, we might say, that the popular Saxon taste became ever more predominant in him. In *Romeo and Juliet* and in the *Merchant of Venice*, there is an evident leaning towards both sides, and necessarily so, as the poet is here still occupied upon subjects completely Italian. But the working at the same time upon historical pieces, settled the poet, as it were, fully in his native soil, and the delineation of the lower orders of the people in *Henry IV.* and *V.* shews that he felt at home there. From the origin of these pieces, the conceit-style, the love of rhyme, the insertion of sonnets, and similar forms of the artificial lyric, cease with him, and the characteristic delight in the simple popular songs, which begins even here in the fairy choruses,

takes the place of the discarded taste. The example given in Shakespeare's formation of the fairy world had, however, little effect. Lily, Drayton, Ben Jonson, and other contemporaries and successors, took full possession of the fairy world for their poems, in part evidently influenced by Shakespeare, but none of them has understood how to follow him even upon the path already cleared. Among the many productions of this kind, Drayton's *Nymphidia* has been most distinguished, a poem which turns upon Oberon's jealousy of the fairy knight Pigwiggen, which paints the fury of the king with quixotic colouring, handling the combat between the two in the style of the chivalric romances, and which, as here, seeks its main charm in the descriptions of the little dwellings, implements, and weapons of the fairies. Let us compare this with Shakespeare's magic creation, which derives its charm entirely from the reverent thoughtfulness, with which the poet clings with his natural earnestness to the popular legends, leaving intact this childlike belief and preserving its object undesecrated; let us compare the two together, and we shall perceive, by the clearest example, the immense distance of our poet even from the best of his contemporaries.

We refer so frequently to the necessity of seeing Shakespeare's plays performed, in order to be able to estimate them fully, based as they are upon the joint action of poetic and dramatic art. It will, therefore, be just to mention the representation, which this most difficult of all theatrical tasks of a modern age met with in all the great stages of Germany. And that we may not be misunderstood, we premise, that however strongly we insist upon this principle, we yet, in the present state of things, warn most decidedly against all

over-bold attempts at Shakespearian representation. If we would perform dramas, in which such an independent position is assigned to the dramatic art as here, we must before everything possess a histrionic art, an art independent and complete. But this art has with us declined with poetic art, and amid the widely distracting concerns of this time, it will scarcely soon recover itself. A rich, art-loving prince, endowed with feeling for the highest dramatic delights and ready to make sacrifices on their behalf, could possibly procure them, were he to invite together to one place, during an annual holiday, the best artists from all theatres, to cast the parts of a few of the Shakespearian pieces. Even then a profound judge of the poet must take the general management of the whole. And if all this were done, a piece like the *Midsummer-Night's Dream* might be at last attempted. This fairy play could be brought upon the English stage, when they had boys early trained for the characters; without this proviso, it is quite ridiculous to wish to command the most difficult parts with powers utterly inappropriate. When a girl utters Oberon's part in a high treble, a character justly represented by painters with abundant beard, in all the dignity of the calm ruler of this hovering world, when the rude goblin Puck is performed by an affected actress, when Titania and her suit appear in ball-costume without beauty or dignity, for ever moving about in the hopping motion of the dancing chorus, in ballet-fashion, the most offensive style, that modern unnaturalness has created, — what then becomes of the sweet charm of these scenes and of these figures, which should appear in pure ærial drapery, which in their sport should retain a certain elevated simplicity, which in the affair between Titania and

Bottom, far from unnecessarily pushing the awkward fellow forward as the principal figure, should understand how to place the ludicrous character at a modest distance and to give the whole scene the quiet charm of a picture, not too violently agitated. If it be impossible to act these fairy forms at the present day, it is equally so with the clowns. The common nature of the mechanics, when they are themselves, is perhaps intelligible to our actors; but when they perform their work of art, where, in an actor of the present day, is the self-denial to be found, that would lead him to represent this most foolish of all follies with the most solemn importance, as if in thorough earnestness, instead of overdoing its exaggeration, instead of self-complacently working by laughter and smiling at himself? Unless this self-denial be observed, the first and greatest object of these scenes, that of exciting laughter, is inevitably lost. Finally, the middle class of mortals, moving between the fairies and the clowns, those lovers, who are driven about by bewildering delusions, what sensation do they excite, when we see them in the frenzy of passion wandering through the wood, in kid-gloves, in knightly dress, with the customary tone of conversation belonging to the refined world, devoid of all warmth, and without a breath of this charming poetry! How can this Theseus, the kinsman of Hercules, and the Amazonian Hippolyta, become the knightly accoutrements of the Spanish comedy? Certain it is that in the fantastic play of an unlimited dream, from which time and place are effaced, we should not suffer these characters to appear in the strict costume of Greek antiquity, but still less, while we avoid one fixed attire, should we pass over to the other, and transport to Athens a knightly dress, and a guard of

Swiss halberdiers. We can only compare with this mistake one equally great, the adding of a disturbing musical accompaniment, inopportunately impeding the rapid course of the action, which roughly disturbs this work of fancy, this delicate and refined action, this ethereal dream, with a march of kettledrums and trumpets, even there where Theseus utters his thoughts upon the unsubstantial nature of these visions? And amid all these modern requisites the simple balcony of the Shakespearian stage was retained, as if in respect to apparatus, we were to return to those days! But yet this simplicity was surrounded with all the magnificence customary at the present day. Elements thus contradictory, thus injudiciously united, tasks thus beautiful, thus imperfectly discharged, must always make the friend of Shakespearian performances desire, that under existing circumstances, they would rather utterly renounce them.

ROMEO AND JULIET.

We have thought to discover, that Shakespeare had designed the two comedies of *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Won*, in an intentional contrast to each other; we shall subsequently perceive, that his thoughtful Muse delighted, still more repeatedly, in placing even other dramas in such an inner relation to each other; it is possible that even the *Midsummer-Night's Dream* he has designed as a true counterpart to *Romeo and Juliet*, in which the same theme is treated in the strongest and most glaring contrast possible. The comedy seemed to us to have originated about the same year (1595), in which the poet may have put the finishing touch to this tragedy, on which almost all editors consider him to have been occupied for a series of years since 1591. We possess a first unauthenticated print of the play dated 1597, which some regard as a mutilated pirated edition of the tragedy as we read it, (essentially according to the improved and enlarged quarto-edition of 1599,) but the latest editors consider it to be the text (spoiled indeed) of an older work of the poet while yet young.* In comparing it, we

* Both copies are to be found in Mommsen's critical edition of *Romeo and Juliet*. Oldenb. 1859.

observe the improving hand of the poet in just as many instructive touches of emendation as in Henry VI. ; from a series of masterly strokes we perceive the growing mind in all important additions, which almost always affect the finest points of the poetical and psychological finish and completion : when he intends to give a fuller body of rhetoric to the reproving speeches of prince Escalus, to delineate more intelligibly the depth of affection in the lovers, the fatally concealed fervour of Romeo's passionate mind, to impress more sharply the explanatory lessons of the monk, to work out connectedly and completely the natural succession of the emotions of the soul in the violent catastrophe of the lovers. Even in the older defective plot, the art of characterization is, however, of such power and certainty, that if excellent existing sources and perhaps still more excellent conjectured ones, had not been before the poet, all the more would it border on the wonderful, the more unripe was his age at his first undertaking the work. For the outward form of the work bears in every way the marks of a youthful hand. The many rhymes, often alternate, the sonnet-form, the thoughts, the expressions even from Shakespeare's sonnet-poetry and from that of his contemporaries, indicate distinctly the period of its origin. It is striking, that in this admired piece, there are more highly pathetic, pompously profound expressions and unnatural images than in any other of Shakespeare's works; the diction too in many and in the most beautiful passages surpasses the dramatic style. Both peculiarities are sufficiently accounted for by the mere youth of the poet; the one is derived partly from the immediate source, which Shakespeare had before him, an English poem by Brooke, abounding with conceits and

antitheses; the other, the undramatic, rather lyric diction of single passages, is deeply connected with the subject itself, and bears evidence to that genius, which we admire beyond everything in Shakespeare's psychological art, even in his employment and treatment of the mere outward form of poetry.

In our interpretations of Shakespeare's works, we shall rarely tarry upon their merely formal beauties; to analyze them is to destroy them; and he who undirected is not touched by them, will never feel them through explanation. Nevertheless this poet is in all his ways so extraordinary and uncommon, that in the piece lying before us, it is possible in the æsthetic analysis to establish in certain passages even this poetic charm, and to sound such a depth of poetry, in comparison with which every other work must appear shallow. We will briefly premise these considerations, that we may subsequently advance unimpeded in our explanation of the dramatic action.

Every reader must feel, that in *Romeo and Juliet*, in spite of the severe dramatic bearing of the whole, an essentially lyric character prevails in some parts. This lies in the nature of the subject. When the poet exhibits to us the love of *Romeo* and *Juliet* in collision with outward circumstances, he is throughout on dramatic ground; when he depicts the lovers in happiness, in the idyllic peace of blissful union, he necessarily then passes over to lyric ground, where thoughts and feelings speak alone, and not actions, such as the drama demands. There are in our present piece three such passages of an essentially lyric nature: *Romeo's* declaration of love at the ball, *Juliet's* soliloquy at the beginning of the bridal night, and the parting of the two on

the morning following this night. If the poet would here, where his grand art for displaying character and motive had not full play, as in the dramatic and animated parts of the piece, if he would here hold an equally high position, he must endeavour to give the greatest possible charm and value to his lyric expressions. This he did; every reader will always revert most readily to just these exquisite passages. But while Shakespeare sought in these very passages after the truest and fullest expression, after the purest and most genuinely poetic form, an artifice (*Kunstgriff*) may be pointed out, we might better say, a trick of nature (*Naturgriff*), which he employed, in order to give these passages the deepest and most comprehensive back-ground. In all three passages he has followed fixed lyric forms of poetry, corresponding to the existing circumstances, and well filled with the usual images and ideas of the respective styles. The three species we allude to, are: the sonnet, the epithalamium or nuptial poem, and the dawn-song (*Tagelied*).

Romeo's declaration of love to Juliet at the ball is certainly not confined within the usual limits of a sonnet, yet in structure, tone, and treatment, it agrees with this form or is derived from it. This species is devoted to love by Petrarca, whom this play on love does not fail to call to mind. Following his example, spiritual love alone in all its brightness and sacredness has been almost always celebrated in this species; never, except in some faint exceptions, has the sensual side of love been sung in it. Now every genuine heart-affection which rests not on a mere intoxication of the senses, but takes hold of the spiritual and moral nature of the man, is in its beginning and origin ever of an entirely inward nature; a beautiful form may for the moment

affect our senses, but only the whole being of a man can enchain us lastingly, and the first perception of such a one is ever purely spiritual. It is thus as judicious as it is true, that the poet has adhered to this canonical style, in which the lyric expresses the first and purest emotions of love, in this first meeting, when the suitor approaches his beloved like a holy shrine with all the reverence of innocence, and in the avowal of his love, moves entirely in spiritual spheres.

Juliet's soliloquy before the bridal-night (Act III. sc. 2.), (and this Halpin has pointed out in the writings of the Shakespeare-society in his usual intellectual manner,) calls to mind the epithalamium, the nuptial poems of the age. The reader may read this wonderful passage, the actress may act it, with that exquisite feeling, which moderates the audible words, into silent thoughts. In the allegorical-myth of the hymeneal, nuptial poems, Halpin points out, that Hymen played the principal part, and Cupid remained concealed, until at the door of the bridal-chamber, the elder brother surrendered his office to the younger. We must suppose that Juliet knew these songs and these ideas, and in her soliloquy uses images familiar to her. Juliet supposes the presence of love, according to the ideas of those poems, as understood; she designates him with the nickname of "the run-away"* (the *δραπέιδας* of Moschus) which devolved upon him originally, because he was in the habit of running away from his mother. She longs for the night, when Romeo may leap to her arms unseen; even "the run-

* This interpretation Staunton rightly declares as indisputable, and Halpin's explanation seems to us wholly unshaken by Grant White's attack (in *Shakespeare's Scholar*, 1856).

away's eyes may wink", she says; he may not, she means, do his office of illuminating the bridal-chamber, where in this case secrecy and darkness are enjoined. Halpin thinks that the blind Cupid may have been an emblem of just such a mysterious marriage-union, for also in the bed-chamber of Imogen, who had contracted such a secret marriage, are two blind Cupids. The absence of the wedding feast under happier auspices leads Juliet naturally to these thoughts. No other sang to her the bridal-song, she sings it, as it were, herself; and this casts a further melancholy charm over this passage, for the absence of the hymeneal feast was considered in olden times as an evil omen, and thus it proves here.

In the scene of Romeo's interview by night with Juliet, the Italian novelists sought, after their rhetorical fashion, opportunity for long speeches; Shakespeare draws over it the veil of chastity which never with him is wanting when required, and he permits us only to hear the echo of the happiness and the danger of the lovers. Here in this farewell-scene there is no play of mind and acuteness as in the sonnet, but feelings and forebodings are at work; the sad gleams of the predicting heart shine through the gloom of a happy Past, which the painful presence of farewell terminates. The Poet's model in this scene (Act III. sc. 2.) is a kind of dialogue poem, which took its rise at the time of the Minnesingers, — the dawn-song. In England there were also these dawn-songs; the song to which, in Romeo and Juliet itself, allusion is made, and which is printed in the first volume of the papers of the Shakespeare society, is expressive of such a condition. The uniform purport of these songs is that two lovers, who visit each other by night for

secret conference, appoint a watcher, who wakes them at dawn of day, when, unwilling to separate, they dispute between themselves or with the watchman, whether the light proceeds from the sun or moon, the waking song from the nightingale or the lark; in harmony with this is the purport also of this dialogue, which indeed far surpasses every other dawn-song in poetic charm and merit.

Thus then this tragedy, which in the sustaining of its action has always been considered as the representative of all love-poetry, has in these passages formally admitted three principal styles, which may represent the erotic lyric. As it has profoundly appropriated to itself all that is most true and deep in the innermost nature of love, so the poet has imbued himself with those external forms also, which the human mind had created long before in this domain of poetry. He preferred rather not to be original, than to mistake the form; he preferred to borrow the expression and the styles, which centuries long had fashioned and developed, in which the very test of their genuineness and durability lay; so that now the lyric love-poetry of all ages is, as it were, recognized again in the forms, images, and expressions employed in this tragedy of love.

The story of our drama has been traced back as far as Xenophon's *Ephesiaca*. The essential elements of it lie in the thirty-second novel of Massuccio (1470), from which they were borrowed by Luigi da Porto, who is generally spoken of as the original narrator of the history of Romeo and Juliet (*La Giulietta* 1535). But Shakespeare's piece comes not even indirectly from these sources, but from a novel of Bandello's, in which to a dramatist, who would take possession of the subject, quite another material was

offered than by Boccaccio in his *Giletta of Narbonne*. From this narrative, "la sfortunata morte di due infelicissimi Amanti" (*Bandello II. 9.*), Arthur Brooke, a well-known poet belonging to the pre-Shakespeare time, derived material for a narrative poem, *Romeus and Juliet*, which first appeared in 1562, and was reprinted in 1587. A poetic Italian narrative of the subject in octavo (*L'infelice amore dei due fedelissimi amanti Giulia e Romeo, scritto in ottava rima da Clitia, nobile Veronese. Venezia. 1553.*) had appeared even before *Bandello's*; whether Brooke employed it besides *Bandello*, we cannot decide, as we have not seen it. On the other hand, in his preface of 1562, Brooke praises a dramatic piece, which had set forth the same argument on the stage, with more commendation than he could look for in his work. This piece, if Brooke had used it, and if we might judge of it from his own work, must have been the most important drama previous to Shakespeare. Whether Shakespeare knew it and made use of it, we know not. We know that he had Brooke's poem before him, in which the colouring, the story, the characters of the nurse, of *Mercutio*, and of the two principal figures, are so prepared, that the poet had in this disproportionably difficult material far lighter work than in *All's Well that Ends Well*. The story itself, which is moreover conspicuous among the Italian novels for that true art of an underlying motive throughout, exchanges in Brooke's poem, the superficial oratory of the south for the profound feeling of the north, and the character of Romanic elegance for the Germanic soul full of exciting passion. In power and exuberance the Italian novels are left far behind, indeed a certain overloading testifies to the poet's richness of feeling. Many fine touches in

the Shakespearian piece first stand out clearly when we have read this narrative, and we shall then perceive by a palpable example, as we shall find in other instances also, how much Shakespeare has often hidden under few words and intimations. If we then pass from Brooke's poem to Shakespeare's tragedy, we find the subject again in this drama infinitely raised, and once more the many appendages of Romanic propriety and rhetorical tinsel are thrust out in the sieve of a genuine Germanic nature. With Brooke, a sensual gratification alternates with the counter-balance of a cold morality, voluptuousness with wisdom, and Ovid-like luxuriance with a pedantic dogmatical tone; contrasts above which Shakespeare rose with the pure ingenuousness of a poet, who identifies himself with his subject. With Brooke, all is play of fortune, chance, destiny, a touching story of two lovers, whom an alternation of prosperity and misfortune has led here and there; but with Shakespeare, the piece is the necessary history of *all* strong love, which is vigorously guided and influenced from within, but never truly and deeply by aught without, which far rather rises superior to every other passion and emotion, which beats proudly against the barriers of conventionality, occupied to excess alone with itself and its satisfaction, deriding the representations of cold discretion, aye, over-bold, defying fate itself, and quarrelling with its warnings to its own ruin.

If we would now advance at once to the central point of this work, the poet, it appears to us, has opened a two-fold way to this, with greater distinctness than is his wont. If we simply conceive the two principal figures in their disposition and circumstances, the idea of the whole steps

of itself to light from this dispassionate consideration of the simple facts; the action alone and its motives suffer it not to be mistaken. But beyond this the poet has given also by direct teaching the thread, which the reader or spectator might not have perhaps discovered from the motives and issue of the action. In these two directions, therefore, we must also divide our considerations; and we will first take the latter, which by a shorter path, but certainly under a more limited aspect, leads to the goal.

The oldest biblical story exhibits work and toil as a curse which is laid on the human race; if it be so, God has mixed with the bitter lot that which can sweeten it; true activity is just that which most ennoble the vocation of man, and which transforms the curse into the richest blessing. On the other hand, there are affections and passions given to us for the heightening of our enjoyments of life; but pursued in an unfair degree, they transform their pleasure and blessing into curse and ruin. Of no truth is the world of actual experience so full, and to none does the poetry of Shakespeare more frequently and more expressively point.

Shakespeare's immediate source for his drama, Arthur Brooke, interspersed his narrative with the reflection that the most noble in man is produced by great passions, but that within these the danger lies, of carrying the man beyond himself and his natural limits, and thus of ruining him. In our drama the passion of love is depicted in this highest degree of attraction and might, giving at once the fullest testimony to its ennobling and to its destroying power. The poet has placed himself between the good and bad attributes of this demon, in that surpassing manner, with which we are

already acquainted in him, and with that noble ingenuousness and impartiality, that it is quite impossible to say whether he may have thought more of the exalting, or less of the debasing power of love. He has depicted its pure and its dangerous effects, its natural nobleness, and its inherent wiles, with that evenness of mind, that we stand struck with admiration at this mighty power, as with wonder at the weakness into which it degenerates. Only few men are capable of receiving this view of the poet, and of allowing his representation to influence them on both sides with equal power and with equal impartiality. Most men incline predominantly to one side alone, and readers of more sensual ardour regard the might of love in this couple, as an ideal power, as a lawful and desirable authority; others of more moral severity take it as an excessive tyranny, which has violently stifled all other inclinations and attractions.

Shakespeare has exhibited in this piece the opposite ends of all human passion, love and hatred, in their extremest power; and as in the *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, by the side of the intoxication of fickle sensual love, he has approvingly laid stress on the contrast of maidenly discretion, so here in the midst of the world agitated by love and hatred, he has placed friar Laurence, whom experience, retirement, and age, have deprived of inclination to either. By him, who, as it were, represents the part of the chorus in this tragedy, the leading idea of the piece is expressed in all fulness, an idea that runs throughout the whole, that excess in any enjoyment however pure in itself, transforms its sweet into bitterness, that devotion to any single feeling however noble, bespeaks its ascendancy; that this ascendancy moves the man and woman out of their natural spheres; that love can only

be a companion to life, and cannot fully fill out the life and business of the man especially; that in the full power of its first rising, it is a paroxysm of happiness, which according to its nature cannot continue in equal strength; that, as the poet says in an image, it is a flower that

"Being smelt, with that part cheers each part;
Being tasted, slays all senses with the heart".

These ideas are placed by the poet in the lips of the wise Laurence in almost a moralizing manner, with gradually increasing emphasis, as if he would provide most circumspectly that no doubt should remain of his meaning. He utters them in his first soliloquy, under the simile of the vegetable world, with which he is occupied, in a manner merely *instructive* and as if without application; he expresses them *warningly*, when he unites the lovers, at the moment when he assists them, and finally he repeats them *reprovingly* to Romeo in his cell, when he sees the latter undoing himself and his own work, and he predicts what the end will be.

"Nought", says the holy man in the first of these passages (Act II. sc. 3.),

"Nought so vile that on the earth doth live,
But to the earth some special good doth give;
Nbr aught so good, but, strain'd from that fair use,
Revolts from true birth, stumbling on abuse:
Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied;
And vice sometime's by action dignified.
Within the infant rind of this small flower
Prison hath residence, and med'cine power:
For this being smelt, with that part cheers each part,
Being tasted, slays all senses with the heart.
Two such opposed foes encamp them still
In man as well as herbs, grace and rude will;
And, when the worser is predominant,
Full soon the canker death eats up that plant".

We see plainly, that these are the two qualities which make Romeo a hero and a slave of love; in happiness with his Juliet, he displays his "grace", in so rich a measure, that he quickly triumphs over a being so gifted; in misfortune he destroys all the charm of these gifts through the "rude will", with which Laurence reproaches him. In the second of the passages pointed out, Romeo, on the threshold of his happiness, challenges love-devouring death to do what he dare, so that he may only call Juliet his; and in warning reproof, friar Laurence tells him, in a passage which the poet has first inserted in his revision of the play, applying the idea of that straining of the good from its fair use: —

"These violent delights have violent ends,
And in their triumph die; like fire and powder,
Which as they kiss, consume. The sweetest honey
Is loathsome in his own deliciousness,
And in the taste confounds the appetite:
Therefore, love moderately; long love doth so".

Just so the reproving words of Laurence, when he sees in his cell the "fond man" in womanly tears, degenerated from his manly nature, despairingly cast down, these words refer again to those first instructive sayings upon the abuse of all noble gifts. "Thou sham'st", he says to him, and this too has been first added in the revised edition:

"Thou sham'st thy shape, thy love, thy wit;
Which like an usurer, abound'st in all,
And usest none in that true use indeed
Which should bedeck thy shape, thy love, thy wit.
Thy noble shape is but a form of wax,
Digressing from the valour of a man,
Thy dear love, sworn, but hollow perjury,
Killing that love, which thou hast vowed to cherish:
Thy wit, that ornament to shape and love,
Misshapen in the conduct of them both,

Like powder in a skill-less soldier's flask,
Is set on fire by thine own ignorance,
And thou dismember'd with thine own defence".

With this significant image, we see Romeo subsequently rushing to death, when he procures from the apothecary the poison by which the trunk is

"discharged of breath
As violently, as hasty powder fir'd
Doth hurry from the fatal canon's womb".

Thrice has the poet with this same simile designated the inflaming heat of this love, which too quickly causes the paroxysm of happiness to consume itself and to vanish, and he could choose no moral aphorism, which with such simple expressiveness could have demonstrated the aim of his representation, but just this image alone.

But as Tieck criticised the conclusion of *Love's Labour's Lost*, Schlegel and many others have opposed the moral, which friar Laurence draws from the story. Romeo's words of rebuff to the holy aged man, who with cold blood preaches morals and philosophy to the lover, those words: "thou canst not speak of what thou dost not feel", have been the guide of the Romanticists in their estimate of Laurence and his wisdom. That the words are spoken in the deepest distraction of a despairing man, whom defiance renders insusceptible of consolation, and passion incapable of every reflection, this was never taken into consideration by them. And yet his Laurence is in this very scene neither delineated as a mechanical and pedantic moralizer, nor as a dry stoic. He has only too much sympathizing regard for the lovers, he enters upon a dangerous plan in order to secure to the couple his union of them, and the plan almost ruins himself. He attempts, indeed, to comfort this desponding man

of love with the cordial of philosophy, but he yields also to such real means of consolation that *the lover himself* could not have devised better, aye, still more, such as he in his despairing defiance *did not find* for himself, which not only comfort him, but for the moment cure him. And not even does it demand a Laurence, to reproach the foolish man, but even the nurse can do so, even his Juliet might do so. We err, this has Schlegel himself said, in taking this pair as an ideal of virtue, but we err perhaps still more from the poet's aim, in passionately siding with their passion. We have no choice otherwise but to blame the tragedist for unfair and unjust cruelty. Thus as their death follows their life, we mean not to say that Shakespeare used a narrow morality, that he made divinity and destiny punish these mortals for the sake of this fault, because an arbitrary law of custom or religion has condemned it. Shakespeare's wise morality, judging from those very sayings which he placed in the lips of friar Laurence in that first soliloquy, knew of no such virtue and no such crime, warranting once for all this reward and punishment. We have heard him say above, that from circumstances "virtue itself turns vice", and "vice sometime's by action dignified", and as he here depicts a love, which sprang from the purest and most innocent grounds, in its ascendancy, in its over-sensibility, and in its self-avenging degeneracy, he has elsewhere elevated that which we take simply for sin, into pardonable, aye, into great actions, for who would hesitate to break like Jessica her filial piety, who would not wish to lie as Desdemona lies? Shakespeare knows only human gifts and dispositions, and a human freedom, reason, and volition, to use them well or ill, madly or with moderation. He knows only a fate which the man

forges for himself from this good or bad use, although he accuses the powers without him as its author, as Romeo does the "inauspicious stars": With him, as throughout actual life, outward circumstances and inward character work one into the other with alternating effect; in this tragedy of love they mutually fashion each other, the one furthers the other, until at last the wheels of destiny and passion are driven into more violent collision, and the end is an overthrow.

Tarrying thus on the moral idea of the piece, and on the tragic conclusion to which this idea urges, it must appear as if the poet clung with greater stress to the severe judgment of the reflective mind, than to the sympathy of the heart, in this rare love, and that he was himself too much that way inclined, than that we could invest him with that strict impartiality, which we have before extolled in him. But if we carry our eye from the abstract contemplation to the action, from the bare isolated idea to the whole representation, to the living warmth and richness of the circumstances, the intricacies, the motives, and the characters, this reproach vanishes of itself. The idea which we have gathered from the didactic passages of the piece, is then more fully enlightened and enlivened in this consideration of the facts; not only does the moral of the action call forth the abstract idea, but the complete view of all co-operating circumstances both within and without, challenges the heart and soul; the whole being of the spectator is called into judgment, not alone his head and mind. It is for this reason that the view of the action in all its completeness, is ever the only accurate way of arriving at an understanding of one of our poet's plays.

We will now, following out our design, survey our drama

also in this second direction, upon the broader and more varied path of its facts and acting characters. At the conclusion we shall again arrive at our former aim, but with our views much more enlarged and informed.

We see two youthful beings of the highest nobility of character and position, endowed with tender hearts, with all the sensual fire of a southern race, standing isolated in two families, who are excited to hatred and murder against each other, and repeatedly fill the town of Verona with blood and uproar. Upon the dark ground of the family hatred, the two figures come out the more clearly. In poetry and history these cases are not rare, that just in the gloom of immoral ages and circumstances, the brightest visions emerge like lilies from the marsh, and Iphigenias and Cordelias in the midst of a race of titanic passions, have illustrated this in ancient and modern poetry. Romeo and Juliet share not the deadly hatred which divides their families; the harmlessness of their nature is alien to their wild spirit; much rather upon this same desolate soil, a thirsting for love has grown in them to excess, more evident in Romeo, but less conscious in Juliet, in the one rather in opposition to the contention raging in the streets, in the other rather in a secret repulse of those nearest to her in her home. The head of his enemies, the old Capulet himself, bears testimony of Romeo, that "Verona brags of him, to be a virtuous and well-governed youth". However much, amid the increasing hindrances to the course of their love, a disproportion and excess of the powers of feeling and affection was developed rapidly and prematurely in both, the two characters were yet originally formed for a harmony of the life of mind and feeling, more for fervent and deep, than

for excited and extravagant affection. It is no impulse of the senses, it is even not merely that self-willed obstinacy, which hurries them at last to ruin upon a hazardous and fatal path, but it is at once the impulse of a touching fidelity and constancy stretching beyond the limits of the grave. The quality of stubborn wilfulness which the friar blames in Romeo, a quality also active in womanly moderation in Juliet, when she appears contrary to her parents' plan for her marriage, is certainly in both an heirloom of the hostile family-spirit, but still deeply concealed by the peaceful influence of innate tenderness of feeling. It is excited in them only in unhappiness and under the pressure of insufferable circumstances, but even then in the harmless beings it is not outwardly hurtful, but its ruinous effects turn only against themselves. That which the friar calls "grace" in the human being, by which outward and inward nobility in appearance and habits is intended, forms the essential nature of both, and if Romeo, according to the words of the friar, in misfortune and despair, under the influence of a defiant spirit, shames his shape, his love, and his wit, that is, all his endowments of person, mind, and heart, these endowments, these even usuriously measured gifts, are still his original nature, which appears in all its lustre in him as in Juliet, when no outer circumstances cross and destroy the peace of their souls. We may compare the emotions of this love with that of another kind in the *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, which "formed by the eye, is there fore like the eye full of strange shapes", of habits and of varied objects, that we may in a fresh aspect measure the full contrast of this passion and of these characters to those represented in the other play. In the scenes, in which the

love between Romeo and Juliet is developed, and the family-foes become in a moment a betrothed and married couple, we see in all its intensity the elevation of these natures above the universal discord around them, and above the personal prejudices, which generally belonged to this dissension. The disregard of danger, the readiness for every sacrifice of life, of propriety, of piety, proves the purity and strength of their love beyond every shadow of a doubt. In the more idyllic scenes, those in which the lovers appear in all the happiness of contentment, the poet has poetically heightened the expression of love in such a manner, and has invested it with such a power of feeling, that the truth and the charm of the poetry convinces us more and more deeply of the truth and nobility of these natures. And in such a measure has he succeeded in this, that the poetic spirit and charm, which he spreads over the lovers, causes most readers even wholly to overlook and to miss the moral severity of the poet, a fact which certainly fully obviates the before-mentioned matter of reproof, that of an excessive tarrying upon the shadow-side of the passion, the circumstances, and the characters.

When, setting aside the later unravellings of the plot, Romeo appears before us previous to his meeting with Juliet, the mixture of these beautiful and noble qualities of his nature with elements of evil, is indeed early decided. This Romeo might be that servant of love, our poem might be the volume, spoken of in "the Two Gentlemen of Verona": — which says that "love inhabits in the finest wits of all", but to this is added, that "by love the young and tender wit is turned to folly", and as the worm in the bud, it is blasted, that it loses "his verdure even in the prime, and all the fair

effects of future hopes". The wise friar Laurence perceived that affliction was enamoured of the susceptible qualities of this deeply agitated and violent nature, and that he was wedded to calamity. Averse to the family-feuds, he is early isolated and alienated from his own house. Oppressed by society repugnant to him, the overflowing feeling is compressed within a bosom, which finds no one in whom it may confide. Of refined mind, and of still more refined feelings, he repels relatives and friends who seek him, and is himself repulsed by a beloved one, for whom he entertains rather an ideal and imaginary affection. Reserved, disdainful of advice, melancholy, laconic, vague, and subtile in his scanty words, he shuns the light, he is an interpreter of dreams, a foreboding disposition, a nature full of fatality. His parents stand aloof from him in a certain back-ground of insignificance; with his nearest relatives and friends he has no heartfelt association. The peaceful, self-sufficient Benvolio, presuming upon a fancied influence over Romeo, is too far beneath him; Mercutio's is a nature too remote from his own. He, and Tybalt on the opposite side, are the two real promoters, the irreconcilable nurturers of the hostile spirit between the two houses. Tybalt appears as a brawler by profession, differing in his dark animosity and outward elegance from the merry and cynical Mercutio who calls him a "fashion-monger". Mercutio, (whose Italian name in Clitia's poem is Marcuccio de' Verti) a perfect contrast to Romeo, is a man without culture, coarse and rude, ugly, a scornful ridiculer of all sensibility and love, of all dreams and presentiments, one who loves to hear himself talk, and in the eyes of his noble friend "will speak more in a minute, than he will stand to in a month"; a man gifted with such

a habit of wit and such a humorous perception of all things, that even in the consciousness of his death-wound and in the bitterness of anger against the author and manner of the blow, he loses not the expression of his humour. According to that description of himself which he draws in an ironical attack against the good Benvolio, he is a quarrel-seeking brawler, a spirit of innate contradiction, too full of confidence in his powers of strength, and as such he proves himself in his meeting with Tybalt. Our Romanticists, according to their fashion, blindly in love with the merry fellow, have started the opinion, that Shakespeare dispatched Mercutio in the 3rd Act, because he blocked up the way for his principal character. This opinion rivals in absurdity that which Goethe in his incomprehensible travesty has done with this character. Mercutio himself in that scene with Benvolio, casts in his humorous manner his own tragic horoscope; two men meeting, so full of quarrel as he, he says to Benvolio, would not live an hour. And this prediction is immediately fulfilled on this hot day in the exciting warmth of action, in himself and Tybalt: they fall just as much a sacrifice to their hating natures, as Romeo to his loving disposition, and for no other aim than this are they placed in contrast to him. Now to that insignificant Benvolio and to this coarse Mercutio, who degrades the object of his idolatrous love with foul derision, Romeo feels himself not disposed to impart the silent joys and sorrows of his heart, and this constrained reserve works fatally upon his nature and upon his destiny. He entertains an affection, as we become acquainted with him, for one Rosaline, a being contrasted to his subsequent love, of Juno-like figure, fair with black eyes, stronger

physically and mentally than Juliet, formed not for ardent love, a niece of Capulet's, and a rejector of his suit. The uncertain necessity of his heart thus remains unsatisfied, he suffers, according to Brooke's suitable image, the vexing torments of a Tantalus, and the void experienced dries up his soul like a sponge. No wonder that subsequently it overdoes itself in the sudden intoxication of a nameless happiness, which too powerfully attacks this unfortified soul, sick with longing and privation, and undermined by sorrow.

The Juliet who is to replace Rosaline, the heiress of the hostile house, lives, unknown to him, in like sorrowful circumstances, though in womanly manner more careless of them. A tender being, small, of delicate frame, a bark not formed for severe shocks and storms, she lives in a domestic intercourse, which unknown must be inwardly more repulsive to her, than the casual intercourse with his friends can be to Romeo. As Romeo, when elevated by happiness, and not depressed by his sickly feelings, appears clever and acute enough, in showing himself equal or superior in quick repartee even to Mercutio, Juliet also is of similar intellectual ability: an Italian girl full of cunning self-command, of quiet steady behaviour, equally clever at evasion and dissimulation. She has inherited something of determination from her father; by quick and witty replies she evades Count Paris; not without reason she is called by her father in his anger "a chop-logick". How can she, in whose mind is so much emotion, whose heart is so tender, and in whose nature we see an originally cheerful disposition, how can she find pleasure in her paternal home, a home at once dull, joyless, and quarrelsome. The old Capulet, her father,

(a masterly design of the poet's) is a man of unequal temper like all passionate natures, quite calculated to explain the alternate outbursts and pauses, in the discord between the houses. Now in his zeal he forgets his crutch, that he may wield the old sword in his aged hands, and now in merrier mood he takes part against his quarrelsome nephew with the enemy of his house, who trustfully attends his ball. On one occasion he thinks his daughter too young to marry, and two days afterwards she appears to him ripe to be a bride; at first with respect to the suitor Paris, like a good father, he leaves the fate of his daughter entirely to her own free choice, then in the outburst of his passion he compels her to a hated marriage, and threatens her in a brutal manner with blows and expulsion. From sorrow at Tybalt's death he relapses, in that scene, into rage, and from rage, after the apparent yielding of his daughter, he passes into the extreme of mirth. Outward refinement of manner was not to be learned from the man, who speaks to the ladies of his ball like a sailor, no more than inward morality from him who had once been a "mouse-hunter", and had to complain of the jealousy of his wife. The lady Capulet is at once a heartless and unimportant woman, who asks advice of her nurse, who in her daughter's extremest suffering coldly leaves her, and entertains the thought of poisoning Romeo, the murderer of Tybalt. The nurse Angelica, designed already in her entire character in Brooke's narrative, is then the real mistress of the house, she manages the mother, she assists the daughter, and fears not to cross the old man in his most violent anger; she is a talker with little modesty, whose society could not aid in making Juliet a Diana, an instructress without propriety, a confidant with no enduring

fidelity, from whom Juliet at length separates with a sudden rejection. To this society is added a conventional wooing of Count Paris, which for the first time obliges the innocent child to read her heart. Hitherto she had, at the most, experienced a sisterly inclination for her cousin Tybalt, as the least intolerable of the many unamiable beings who formed her society. But how little filial feeling united the daughter to the family, is glaringly exhibited in that passage, in which, even before she has experienced the worst treatment from her parents, the striking expression escapes her upon the death of this same Tybalt, that if it had been her parents' death, she would have mourned them only with "modern lamentation".

Such is the inward condition of both, when for the first time they meet at the ball: *she*, urged by the suit of the count, and by her mother's instigations, to regard the guests for the first time with enquiring heart, in all the freshness of youth; *he*, out of humour in his hopeless love for Rosaline, not without reason full of misgiving upon the threshold of an enemy's house, where indeed Tybalt on his entrance imbibes his fatal hatred against Romeo, but regardless of life, and goaded on by daring friends to weigh his disdainful beauty against others. Outward beauty is presupposed in both; at her first appearance, he exclaims: "Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear"! To these outward endowments, inward charms are then added. On their first greeting they find occasion to test their versatile intelligence; so that this rare union of physical and mental gifts works in the first moment with enchaining and attractive charm. His first address to Juliet at the ball is a fine web of witty thought; a play of conceits veils the declaration and the

acceptance, which by mutual satisfaction, begun in riddles, is ingeniously understood and is cleverly carried on. For it is just this which constitutes the charm of this scene, that as Romeo seems to listen to the sweet devices of Juliet in this strife of thought, so Juliet in quiet happy appreciation of his images, listens equally pleased with his mind and wit as with his feelings; that she delights not only in his kiss, but also that he kisses "by the book", that is, with witty allusion and form, according to the rule of cleverly carrying on a given course of thought, observed in the humorous play of wit of that age. If the reader feels here, that to that physical beauty, to that mental superiority, is yet added that full and perfect impression of soundness and purity, — that moral impression, which we usually on first meeting with men receive with true instinct most surely and fully, — he will afterwards feel no shock, when with full sail, the two, in the next hour of meeting, steer towards the same goal.

How the garden-scene, which follows this first meeting, is to be regarded, the poet has pointed out to us in a few words in the chorus at the conclusion of the first act. Romeo can hope for an interview only at the peril of his life, and Juliet not at all; nature and inclination urge the two enemies to mutual love, and the circumstances concur in making this new bond indissoluble. They *must* endeavour to seize the first opportunity, and fate comes to the assistance of Juliet and her modesty: she betrays her feelings in a soliloquy by night to the listening Romeo, and has, therefore, nothing more to keep back. The one repelled by the suitor Paris, the other by the disdainful Rosaline, they rush the more readily into each other's extended arms.

How, in the midst of the burning contests of their families, in the subversion of all social barriers around them, how should they think of propriety, and as Juliet says, "dwell on form"? In the hurry of the recall, in the terrible choice between never meeting again, and for ever belonging to each other, she proposes marriage to Romeo, unscrupulously determined to carry out the bold step. How modesty and maidenly shame strive discordantly in her open soul with love and devotion, innocence with passion; the wish to dare to believe with the fear of a frivolous sport of Romeo's with her weakness; how, and this is a further token of her versatile mind, how in the hurry of the moment, in the pressure of passion, she hints with at least one word, at all important circumstances, at all opposing feelings, when time forbids her to linger with riper reflection on the subject; how she seizes and wards off, speaks and retracts, wishes to exhibit all love and yet not to appear frivolous, how she declines his oaths and yet bears in mind the falseness of men, how she delights in her happiness and "sweet repose", and nevertheless in this night-contract has no joy but a foreboding care; — all this alternates in amazing profusion in the fleeting time, and displays a soul of endless depth and richness. In this conduct we need not deny a stepping out of womanly nature, but in the nature of the beings and circumstances, in motives within and necessity without, indeed in the innocence of the child without guile or deceit, and in their good intentions, there rests that which can justify this step before God and the world. The wise recluse himself in approval of the object, in the prospect of the restoration of the family-peace, gives his blessing to the secret union. The hurried perturbation of his young friend alone makes

him apprehensive; the passionate impatience of his confessant Juliet leads him not to doubt the pure innocence of her step. The reader must be cautious of seeking to attach any stain to the heroine of the piece from this side of her character. The German at once perhaps feels a scruple at that speedy kiss on their first meeting: but these kisses of courtesy in public society, in and before Shakespeare's time, were an English custom, concerning which in France, but not in the country, there were scruples.* In England again, with a very customary mock-modesty, they have hesitated as to Juliet's soliloquy on the wedding-day; but nowhere is the shame and charm of innocence so bewitchingly expressed as it is here. We know from the nurse, that at any news the wanton blood comes scarlet in her cheeks; thus she says herself, in an image taken from the wild falcon who tolerates no society, that when waiting for her lover, "the unmanned blood" bates in her cheeks. What she says and thinks of this, she clothes unconsciously, as if she had no thoughts of her own for it, in the language of those nuptial songs, which would be used by the noblest and would be heard by the most virtuous. The poet, remarks Halpin, who was once considered a barbarian, does in this way all that he can, so that no unbecoming word should be placed on the lips of his innocent heroine, not even in the moment, when she is at the highest point of her ardent passion.

And now, after we have learned to know these cha-

* In Cavendish's *Life of Wolsey* there is an anecdote which illustrates this difference of custom. In *Henry V.* also Katharine urges the French custom to her wooer.

racters thus constituted, we shall find in affecting succession, the fates of the lovers and of their houses intelligibly developed out of their own nature, and not out of the chance decrees of the goddess Fortune. Romeo certainly has nothing in his nature, which in an active manner would have kept up the strife of the families, but certainly also with his close temper he did nothing to relax it. This reserved nature now works in him afresh. Animated by his youthful happiness, he turns indeed suddenly as to a new life, and the melancholy friend astonishes Mercutio with his ready wit; yet his cheerful humour extends not so far as to dispose him to free communication. He hides his successful affection from his friends more carefully than his sorrow for Rosaline; this reserved enjoyment of a prosperous affection is in general rarely belonging to man's nature and temper. The friends were unquestionably more worthy of his confidence, than the nurse of that of Juliet; had he communicated his feelings to them, Mercutio had avoided the wantonly sought combat with Tybalt, Romeo had not killed Tybalt, the first seed of the rapidly rising mischief had not been scattered. With considerate moderation, Romeo has the prudence to avoid Tybalt, but not to whisper a word in the ear of his friend; much less we may believe to restrain the flaming fire of vengeance, when the triumphant murderer of his friend returns. When he has killed him, in his stubborn taciturn manner, he compresses his complete expectation of a dreaded fate into the words "I am fortune's fool!" as subsequently, after Juliet's death, he throws into one sentence his despair and defiance; a more open nature would have at both times avoided the extremity by communication. In him a hidden fire burns with a dangerous

flame; his slight forebodings are fulfilled, not because a blind chance causes them to be realized, but because his fatal propensity urges him to rash deeds; he calls that fortune, which is the work of his peculiar nature. He is banished by the Duke; and now the poet shows us in a remarkable parallel the difference between the two characters in the same condition of misery; the nature of the sexes is in these opposite scenes delineated in a wonderful manner. The tenderer being, in despair at the first moment, is soon comforted by her own reflection, soon even capable of comforting, soon bent upon means of remedy; the stronger man, on the contrary, is quite crushed, quite incapable of self-command, quite inaccessible to consolation. The nature of the woman is not so much changed by this omnipotence of love, but the man's power and self-possession are destroyed by the excess of this one feeling. Juliet has lost her cousin, she had at first feared the death of Romeo, she has next to deplore his banishment, in her helpless condition she has more cause for lamentation and grief than he, her agitation is increased for a moment by violent discontent, if not hatred against Romeo: all her hope rested on the restoration of family unity, and this has Romeo again placed at a distance by Tybalt's death. She declaims against him with unjust vehemence, but she soon repents this, and reproaches herself when she thinks on his own danger. Seized with this thought, she speedily finds courage and consolation, power to endure and to act, with that happy harmony, which belongs to the female nature. Tybalt might indeed have killed him; she bids her tears return to their native spring; she *herself* enumerates the grounds of consolation, grounds which the unhappy Romeo will not even listen

to, when friar Laurence enumerates them to him. For a moment the idea of banishment agitates her into complete hopelessness, but she quickly seizes the natural means of lulling her sorrow which the nurse suggests to her, of healing separation by the chance of reunion, and the sorrow of love by its joys. Quite otherwise is it with the violent impetuous man in friar Laurence's cell, in whom at the word banishment, the long repressed inward emotion breaks forth in fearful lamentation, and makes him incapable of reflection and of action, when he stood most in need of both. He had himself passed in excitement through that scene, the cause of his banishment, he had reason to feel himself entirely free from reproach in the fatal duel, he hears his mild verdict from the forbearing lips of a friend. All comes to him in infinitely milder form than to Juliet, whom her distracted nurse tormented with mistaken apprehensions. Yet in himself he finds nothing of the power of consolation and cure, as his Juliet does in a similar, aye, even in a position outwardly worse, but in a condition inwardly better. He rejects the burden of the blessing which descends upon him; like an obstinate child desponding with uncontrolled grief, he refuses the comfort and the encouragement of his wise friend. The aged recluse must admonish him that "such die miserable"; nay, what is more in Romeo's condition, he must remind him to think of his friend, to live for her who lives for him, who thinks for him and acts for him. Not the sage alone, even the nurse must scold him and his stubbornness, which is deaf even to the threatening danger. When he draws his sword, when he throws himself down senseless, we see him certainly "taking the measure of an unmade grave", solicitous about the man, whom no image

of manly duty and dignity, whom the prospect alone of the acme of his loving delight, the meeting with Juliet, can cause to be himself again.

The poet has twice made the two in agitating alternation taste the joy and sorrow of love; twice by turns does the delight of love tinge their cheeks with red, and the sorrow of love, drinking up their blood, make them pale; this old song of love, laboured after by a thousand poets, has never been sung in such full strains. The first catastrophe of Tybalt's death followed upon the meeting in the garden, and touched and tried Romeo the more severely; the second, the betrothal to Paris, followed close upon the bridal-night, and touched and tried Juliet with more cruel force. If in the one, Romeo came off less to our liking; at this second stroke this is now the case with Juliet; if the man then lost his manly nature, Juliet is now for the moment carried out of her womanly sphere. Just elevated by the happiness of Romeo's society, she has lost the delicate line of propriety within which her being moved. Even when her mother speaks of her design of causing Romeo to be poisoned, she plays with too great wantonness with her words, when she should rather have been full of care; and when her mother then announces to her the un-asked-for husband, she has lost her former craftiness, with a mild request or with a clever pretext to delay the marriage; she is scornful towards her mother, straight-forward and open to her father, whose caprice and passion she provokes, and subsequently she trifles with confession and sacred things in a manner not altogether womanly. But that we should not even here lose our sympathy with this being, she rises at the same time in this very catastrophe with all the moral elevation of her

nature. When she is abandoned by father and mother, and is at length heartlessly advised by her nurse to separate from Romeo, she throws off even this last support; she rises grandly above the "ancient damnation", faithlessness, and perjury, and will rather strike a death-blow to hand and heart, than turn with perfidious desertion to another. When obstacles cross love, it rises to its utmost height, when compulsion and force would annihilate it, faithfulness and constancy become the sole duty. And this it is, which in the midst of the tragic defeat of this love, glorifies its victory. If the lovers previously in sensual ardour had innocently aspired after happiness and enjoyment, they now, without hesitation, with moral steadfastness, hastened towards death, which would inseparably unite them. Over-excited by the exertion and depression of joy and sorrow, agitated by sleepless nights, made undutiful on the threshold of a forced marriage, as soon as she is alone those sluices of Juliet's hopelessness are opened wide, which previously womanly dissimulation had closed: she is ready to die. But still not even now does she lose her womanly self-command. Her first course is to ask counsel of friar Laurence; her last design is suicide; this firm will calls the friar into its desperate counsels. It is a fearful adventure, upon which Juliet unscrupulously resolves, although shortly before its execution, womanly nature and timidity, after so much excitement, demand a natural tribute. But at the same time it is an ingeniously hazardous game, practicable to the circumspect Juliet, but not so to a man of such vast passions as Romeo. He had fixed with Laurence to receive intelligence by means of his man, but he had also promised Juliet to omit no opportunity of conveying his greetings to her; he had

sent his servant also to Juliet. To such an extent does the impatience of love cross the unimpassioned hand of the confidential watcher over its fate. Balthazar comes with the sad tidings of Juliet's death; it falls upon the man, who in his solitary fatal mood had, waking or asleep, dreamed and brooded only over death and poison. In the Italian tales, Romeo then raves in a long speech; in Shakespeare, one sentence — "It is even so? then I defy you, stars!" decides the rash obstinate resolve, with that same dumb despair of a nature secretly agitated, such as we know Romeo's to have been. He defies the fate that would have helped him, had he consented to its rule; he crosses it with the self-will of hardened defiance, which, once on the path of evil, only too readily, as if delighting in self-annihilation, rushes towards the utmost limit. In this agitation of mind, Romeo in a moral point of view will scarcely appear to us any longer accountable. The strength of the impulse of love, which with overwhelming force made him seek for that final union with his Juliet, the hearty fidelity, which, without a distant shadow of doubt, felt itself inviolably bound to follow his dead beloved one in her dread journey, will root in us far rather the one feeling of painful admiration. Letters from friar Laurence had been promised him, he asked twice for them, he can no longer wait for them. He travels to Verona in spite of the fact, that death rests upon his presence. He purchases the poison; the strongest, which shall destroy his life like an explosion of gun-powder; the closed shop must open on the holiday; that he brings the apothecary under punishment of death, perplexes him not; there is no question as to the cause of the most unnatural tidings. On his way, he has heard but with deafened ear the

story of Paris' suit, rather he has heard it not. He goes not to friar Laurence, the first course of Juliet in a similar position. Death is his only, his first, and not as with Juliet, his last thought! It came indeed never too late, and could never be missed! He comes to the church-yard. In his fierce wild mood he falls in with Paris, who endeavours to apprehend him; he knows that he will murder a guiltless unknown, this consideration restrains him not in his bloody haste. Shakespeare has himself added this touch of the murder of Paris to the narrative of the novel. He now sees Juliet undisfigured, in all her brightness and beauty, lying as if alive; it startles him not. He rushes after death; one thought alone urges on this self-willed uncontrolled spirit, — that of driving his leaky bark upon the shattering rocks. "A greater Power than we can contradict", says the noble friar, "hath thwarted our plans for safety." It was essentially the fearful power of passion in Romeo; it holds good with him what Shakespeare says of love in Hamlet, that its

Violent property foredoes itself,
And leads the will to desperate undertakings,
As oft as any passion under heaven,
That does afflict our natures.

We have no blind accident of fate to accuse, and no arbitrary exercise of punishment in the poet, but this passionate nature, in the power of one single happy and yet fatal feeling, which shatters the helm of its own preservation and exercises justice upon itself. The poet could not let those live who destroyed themselves. And it is a lamentable tender-heartedness, when here and there in subsequent alterations of the play, the pair have been suf-

ferred to live, to the great joy of the public who were not equal to the profound thought of the poet. So on the other hand, in the old tales and afterwards in Garrick's version of the play, it is grossly repugnant to us, that Juliet wakes, while Romeo yet lives. Upon this Schlegel has discoursed with excellence. The grief and agitation were indeed already sufficient; the more innocent bride, linked in happiness or misery to the destiny of her husband, well deserved, under the pressure of misfortune, more speedily to reach the end, as it were, without consciousness, and rightly was she spared from learning, how near and how possible safety had been. The Italian novelists liked this prolongation of the torture, in order to gain an opportunity for a final pathetic speech. These extreme agitations our poet shunned; he has previously only wisely inserted them, when Juliet learns Tybalt's death, when Romeo yields to despair in friar Laurence's cell, scenes, which the Italian novels do not contain, which in the drama excellently serve their end of making us acquainted with these sensitive natures and preparing us for the catastrophe of their fate. In the end, when the utmost had happened, it was more human, to be sparing of torture, and rather to restore composure to the soul. Over the grave of this unbounded isolated love, the common irreconcilable hatred is extinguished, and peace is again restored to the families and to the town. As this vehemence of love could arise only amid the narrowing hatred of the families and amid the continual fear of disturbance, so the hatred of the families appeared only able to be extinguished by the sacrifice of their noblest members. The exuberance of the love which killed them, overflowed after their death, and the blood shed nourished the soil for

reconciliation, which could not take root before. The happiness of their love was, as it says in the *Midsummer-Night's Dream*,

"momentary as a sound,
Swift as a shadow, short as any dream;
Brief as the lightning in the collied night,
That in a spleen, unfolds both heaven and earth,
And ere a man hath power to say, — Behold!
The jaws of darkness do devour it up";

but in this lightning, the storm-laden air hanging over the state of Verona disburdened itself, and the first enduring brightness follows upon the last passing darkness.

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE.

We have placed together in an unbroken series the erotic plays of Shakespeare, the end of which is formed according to purport and significance by *Romeo and Juliet*. The *Merchant of Venice*, which in intention and matter does not belong to this series, the love-affairs it contains having only a subordinate signification, dates the time of its origin indeed before that of *Romeo and Juliet*, and the *Midsummer-Night's Dream*. According to Henslowe's Journal, a Venetian comedy was produced in 1594, and it were possible for this to have been our piece, because at that time the company of the Blackfriars acted in union with the company which Henslowe led at Newington Butts. In the form, the versification, the few doggerel verses, and the alternate rhymes, which are found in the piece, we shall less seek the evidence of its age, than in certain inner tokens which place it rather among the earlier pieces. The allusions to the ancient myths are much more frequent here than in *Romeo and Juliet*; the greater want of delicacy in the conversation of noble ladies, which Shakespeare subsequently ever more laid aside, may be compared with that which we find in *Love's Labour's Lost* and in the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Launcelot appears

almost even in name to be only an off-shoot of the Launce in the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*; the counterpart of Jessica's relation with her father, in the scene of Launcelot's with his, is quite kept up in the manner of the similar scene in the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*; when he shows the old man the way, we are entirely reminded of the jests in the Latin comedy. All these possess a kindred likeness with the older pieces, which *Romeo and Juliet* had rather outgrown.

The story of the *Merchant of Venice* is a blending together of the two originally separate narratives of the action for the pound of flesh and of the three caskets. Both are in the well known collection of the *Gesta Romanorum*; the anecdote of the three caskets very short and simple, but almost with the same substance in the inscriptions, as we read in our own piece. The narrative most allied to the principal story is to be found in a very rough and fantastic form in the *Pecorone* of Giovanni Fiorentino, a work of the 14th century, printed in 1554. The circumstance, which according to Shakespeare took place between the two friends, Bassanio and Antonio, is there imputed to a foster-father and son. The latter woos a lady of Belmont, who, with Circean cunning, ensnares her suitors, this one among the rest, and twice takes his vessel from him. The third time he equips his ship with foreign gold, pledging the pound of flesh from his foster-father; this time, wisely warned, he obtains the lady, who also subsequently becomes the judge in the lawsuit. Even the play with the ring, which forms the main substance of the 5th Act of our drama, is not lacking here: so that only instead of the magic arts of the lady of Belmont, the anecdote of the three caskets is intro-

duced and the thrice repeated undertaking is resolved into one. It has justly been remarked, how skilful was this blending together of two equally strange adventures, for the production of that harmony which is indispensable to artistic illusion. The touch of improbability on both parts transports more effectively into the world of romance, than a single adventure of this kind could have done; the figurative character of the will suits that of the lawsuit; the skilful combination produces that probability which we draw from the repetition of similar circumstances, even when in the abstract they are utterly strange to us. As far as we know, there were no English translations, in Shakespeare's time, of the narrative sources of the story. But perhaps the subject of the piece, with the same blending of two originally separate narratives, had been prepared in an older play previous to Shakespeare. Gosson, in his *School of Abuse* (1579) speaks of a piece, "The Jew", the subject of which exhibited "the greedinesse of worldly chusers, and bloody mindes of usurers". We see indeed that this so strikingly agrees with the two united parts of our piece, the suitors of Portia and Shylock, that it is hardly to be doubted that this piece had already handled the same material; so that Shakespeare in the *Merchant of Venice* had before him for his use an older play. What assistance that supposed forerunner of the *Merchant of Venice* may have afforded, we naturally cannot know; in those old tales scarcely the frame-work was available to Shakespeare. From those idle stories full of the most improbable occurrences, he has formed a piece full of the deepest worldly wisdom, which if we strip off the garb of romance and the enhancement of passion, may be regarded more than any other of

his works as a mirror which excellently reflects the very reality of common life.

For the understanding of Shakespeare nothing is perhaps so instructive as at times, when striking occasions offer, to place by the side of our own reflections upon his works, the explanation of other interpreters, in order that by comparing a series of double expositions, we may penetrate closer and closer to the substance of the Shakespearian poetry. We shall by this means perceive, how very different are the points of view, from which these poems may be apprehended, and how, not without a certain degree and appearance of justice, various opinions upon the same piece may be advanced: which is only a proof of the richness and many-sidedness of these works. At the same time, this will give us occasion to examine ourselves, whether we do not lose that pure susceptibility and unbiassed mind in comprehending the writings of our master, in order that we may approach as far as possible to the one idea which moved the poet himself in each of his creations, and that we may find out this one idea from the many which each of the more important of those creations is capable of suggesting to the versatile minds of our own day. We shall besides in this comparison of interpretation have occasion repeatedly to show, where the key to Shakespeare's works is really to be found, and of what kind are the leading ideas according to which he has formed his plays.

Ulrici has before justly remarked, that the connecting threads in this piece lie very much hidden in the disparate circumstances that form it. The poet has here not given himself the trouble as in *Romeo and Juliet* to insinuate his design by express explanation. Ulrici (and Rötischer also)

perceived the fundamental idea of the Merchant of Venice in the sentence: *summum jus summa injuria*. With ability and ingenuity he has referred the separate parts to this one central point. The law-suit in which Shylock enforces the letter of justice, and is himself avengingly struck by the letter of justice, is thus placed in the true centre of the piece. The arbitrariness of the will, in which Portia's father appears to assert the whole severity of his paternal right, and as Portia herself laments, withholds his right from the possessor, unites in one idea the second element of the piece with its principal part. Jessica's escape from her father, forms the contrast to this; in the one right is wrong, in the other, wrong is right. The intricacy of right and wrong appears at length at its greatest pitch in the quarrel of the lovers in the last act. Even Launcelot's reflections on the right and wrong of his running away, his blame of Jessica in the 4th Act, concur with this point of view. We finally understand the stress which Portia, in her speech to Shylock, lays upon mercy: not severe right, but tempered equity alone can hold society together.

But when we look only upon the external structure of the piece, the essentially acting characters do not all stand in relation to this idea, a requirement fulfilled in all the maturer works of our poet. Bassanio, who is really the link uniting the principal actors in the two separate adventures, Antonio and Portia, has nothing to do with this idea. Just as little have the friends and parasites of Antonio, the suitors of Portia. Moreover Portia's father is called a virtuous holy man, who has left behind him the order concerning the caskets out of kindness, in a sort of inspiration, but in no wise in a severe employment of paternal power. But were

we not at all to take into account these grounds, which we draw from the interweaving of the acting characters with the fundamental idea of the piece, we should believe that a reflection like the above will not be read without compulsion in almost any of the Shakespearian pieces. Such propositions, such explanations, we only arrive at, when we consider the story, the action, in this or other pieces, as the central point in question. Ulrici does this: he calls this piece a comedy of intrigue, as, even infinitely more unsuitably, he has also designated *Cymbeline*, which must be classed with those most magnificent works of the poet, which like *Lear* confine within the narrow scope of a drama, almost the richness of an *épos*. To Ulrici the story of the piece is a given subject; to us, — who do not so separate the dramatic forms, since even Shakespeare has not so separated them, for to him farther out of every material a particular form arose naturally, fashioned according to inner laws, — to us, the story grows out of the peculiar nature of the characters. *This* Shylock first connects the plot of the action with *this* Antonio, through *this* Bassanio; these men, their characters, and motives exist for our poet before the plot, which results from their co-operation. Granted, that the subject was transmitted to the poet, and that here as in *All's Well that Ends Well*, he held himself conscientiously bound to the strangest of all materials: that which most distinguishes him and his poetry, that in which he maintains his freest motion, that from which he designs the structure of his pieces, and even creates the given subject anew; is ever the characters themselves and the motives of their actions. Here the poet is ever himself, ever great, ever ingenious and original; the story of his plays is for the

most part borrowed, often strange, without probability, and in itself of no value. Unconcerned he allows them to remain as a poetic symbol for every thing analogous which might be possible in reality; he investigates human nature, the qualities and passions which probably would be capable of committing such an action, and he now presents to view the springs of these passions, of these dispositions of mind and character, in a simple picture, from which we are indeed never led to an abstract sentence, like Ulrici's. What we may call the leading idea, the acting soul, in Shakespeare's plays; ever expresses plainly and simply a single relation, a single passion or form of character. The nature and property of love and jealousy, the soap-bubbles thrown forth by the thirst for glory, irresolution avoiding its task, these are the images, the views, which Romeo and Othello, Love's Labour's Lost and Hamlet present to us, and from which, without aphorism and reflection, rarely from the action and story considered by itself, but ever from a closer investigation of the motives of the actors themselves, we perceive the poet's purpose. It is just this which Shakespeare himself in Hamlet demanded from the art: that it should hold the mirror up to nature, that it should give a representation of life, of men, and their operating powers, by which means it works indeed morally, but in the purest poetic way, by image, by lively representation, and by imaginative skill. To perceive and to know the virtues and crimes of men, to reflect them as in a mirror and to exhibit them in their sources, their nature, their workings, and their results, and in such a way, as to exclude chance and to banish arbitrary fate, which can have no place in a well-ordered world, this

*This is not
has been so*

is the task, which Shakespeare has imposed upon the poet and upon himself.

We will now say, what reflections the Merchant of Venice has excited in our own mind. We have heard above, how Gosson designated the moral of a piece, whose purport we have supposed the same as that of the Merchant of Venice: it represented "the greediness of worldly chusers and the bloody mindes of usurers". In Shakespeare's time, the idea and aim of a stage-piece was always conceived in such a simple, practically moral manner. In a similar way, in order to keep with the spirit of the time, we ought always to note the kernel of the pieces of that age, and in doing this, we ought even not to avoid the risk of appearing trivial. We could after our own fashion say in a more abstract and pretentious form, that the intention of the poet in the Merchant of Venice was to depict the relation of man to property. The more commonplace this might appear, the more worthy of admiration is that which Shakespeare, in his embodiment of this subject, has accomplished with extraordinary, profound, and poetic power.

If we look back to the pieces which we have previously perused, but still more when we shall have gone through the rest of the works belonging to this period, and at its close shall revert to Shakespeare's life, we shall see our poet throughout the whole space of time, and in almost all the works which proceeded from him, struggling as it were with one great idea, which at length exhibits a similar conflict within himself, in which his nobler spiritual nature battles with and overcomes the lower world without: one indeed of the most remarkable dramas in the inner life of a man, however fragmentary may be the touches, with which we

must delineate it. We have before intimated, that in the historical pieces, which almost wholly belong to this period, we should point out the poet as occupied with this one fundamental idea: — in the wide sphere of public life, in the history of states and princes, no less than in private life, all reflections lead to this, that merit, deeds, character, education, inner worth and greatness, surpass ancestral right, rank, and outward pretensions. In the pieces, which we have last gone through, the poet has throughout taken a stand in opposition to all unreality, to false fickle friendship and love, to vain parade of learning, of all strained heroism of mind and of wit, to all seeming merit, and assumption of ancestry and nobility, to a show of valour and bullying, even to the feigned air of the man who is sinking under the weight of a noble passion. We would in this place draw the attention to a characteristic, which, as much as any in Shakespeare's works, leads directly to a view of the personal nature of the poet. To no subject does Shakespeare so often revert in aphorisms, and in satirical invectives with the most violent bitterness, as to the custom at that time gaining ground, of wearing false hair and rouge, and in this manner of affecting youthful ornament and beauty upon head and face. Nothing expresses more simply than this touch, the profound abhorrence which Shakespeare with a nature perfectly true and unfeigned, bore towards all physical and moral tinsel and varnish in man. To sum up all, the poet's spirit and thoughts early aspired from the outward to the inward being, to the marrow and kernel of a genuine and worthy existence and life, and in this highest sense, ever seeing more largely and widely, he conceived his poetic writings, matured them, and brought them forth.

In the present piece then, this idea so dominant in the poet's mind has been grasped in its very centre. The god of the world, the image of show, the symbol of all external things, is money, and it is so called by Shakespeare and in all proverbs. To examine the relation of man to property, to money, is to place their intrinsic value on the finest scale, and to separate that which belongs to the unessential, to outward things, from that which in its inward nature relates to a higher destiny. As attributes of show, gold and silver, misleading and testing, are taken as the material of Portia's caskets, and Bassanio's comments on the caskets mark the true meaning of the piece:

is in some of relationships man to property

"So may the outward shows be least themselves;
 The world is still deceived with ornament.
 In law, what plea so tainted and corrupt,
 But, being season'd with a gracious voice,
 Obscures the show of evil? In religion,
 What damned error, but some sober brow
 Will bless it, and approve it with a text,
 Hiding the grossness with fair ornament?
 There is no vice so simple, but assumes
 Some mark of virtue on its outward parts.
 How many cowards assume but valour's excrement,
 To render them redoubted. Look on beauty,
 And you shall see 'tis purchased by the weight;
 So are those crisped snaky golden locks,
 Which make such wanton gambols with the wind,
 Upon supposed fairness, often known
 To be the dowry of a second head,
 The scull that bred them, in the sepulchre.
 Thus ornament is but the guiled shore
 To a most dangerous sea; the beautiful scarf
 Veiling an Indian beauty; in a word,
 The seeming truth which cunning times put on
 To entrap the wisest".

The chooser therefore turns away from the gold and

silver, as from the current and received image of that precarious show, and turns to the lead, "which rather threatenest, than doth promise aught". And so, not his relation alone, but the relation of a number of beings to this perishable false good, gold, is depicted in our piece. An abundance of characters and circumstances displays how the possession produces in men barbarity and cruelty, hatred and obduracy, anxiety and indifference, spleen and fickleness, and again how it calls forth the highest virtues and qualities, and by testing, confirms them. But essentially the relation of the outward possession to an inclination entirely inward, to friendship, is placed prominently forward. And this is indeed inserted by the poet in the original story, yet not arbitrarily interwoven with it, but developed according to its inmost nature from the materials given. For the question of man's relation to property is ever at the same time a question of his relation to man, as it cannot be imagined apart from man. The miser, who seeks to deprive others of possession and to seize upon it himself, will hate and will be hated. The spend-thrift, who gives and bestows, loves and will be loved. The relation of both to possession, their riches or their poverty, will, as it changes, also change their relation to their fellow men. For this reason the old story of Timon, handled by our poet in its profoundest sense, is at once a history of prodigality, and a history of false friendship. And thus has Shakespeare, in the poem before us, represented a genuine brotherhood between the pictures he sets forth of avarice and prodigality, of hard usury and inconsiderate extravagance, so that the piece may just as well be called a song of true friendship. The most unselfish spiritual affection is placed in contrast to the most selfish

worldly one, the most essential truth to unessential show. For even sexual love in its purest and deepest form, through the addition of sensual enjoyment, is not in the same measure free from selfishness, as friendship, an inclination of the soul, which is wholly based upon the absence of all egotism and self-love, and whose purity and elevation is tested by nothing so truly, as by the exact opposite, the point of possession, which excites most powerfully the selfishness and self-interest of men.

And now we shall see, how the apparently disparate circumstances of our piece work wonderfully one into the other, and with what wisdom the principal characters are arranged with respect to each other.

In the centre of the actors in the play, in a rather passive position, stands Antonio, the princely merchant, of enviable immense possessions, a Timon, a Shylock, in riches, but with a noble nature elevated far above the effects, which wealth produced in these men. Placed between the generous and the miser, between the spend-thrift and the usurer, between Bassanio and Shylock, between friend and foe, he is not even remotely tempted by the vices, into which these have fallen; there is not the slightest trace to be discovered in him of that care for his wealth, which Salanio and Salarino impute to him, who in its possession would be its slaves. But his great riches have inflicted another evil upon him, the malady of the rich, who have been agitated and tried by nothing, and have never experienced the pressure of the world. He has the spleen, he is melancholy; a sadness has seized him, the source of which no one knows; he has a presentiment of some danger, such as Shakespeare always imparts to all sensitive, susceptible natures. In this

spleen, like all hypochondriacs, he takes delight in cheerful society; he is surrounded by a number of parasites and flatterers, among whom is one more noble character, Bassanio, with whom alone a deeper impulse of friendship connects him. He is affable, mild, generous to all, without knowing their tricks, without sharing their mirth; the loquacious versatility, the humour of a Gratiano is nothing to him; his pleasure in their intercourse is passive, according to his universal apathy. His nature is quiet and is with difficulty affected; when his property and its management leaves him without anxiety, he utters a "fie, fie" over the supposition, that he is in love; touched by no fault, but moved also by no virtue, he appears passionless, almost an automaton. It is a doubly happy position, which the poet has given him in the midst of the more active characters of the piece: for were he of less negative greatness, he would throw all others into deep shadow; we should feel too painful and exciting a sympathy in his subsequent danger. But he is not, therefore, to appear quite feelingless. For in one point he shows that he shared gall, flesh, and blood with others. When brought into contact with the usurer, the Jew Shylock, we see him in an agitation, which partly flows from moral and business principles, partly from intolerance, and from national religious aversion. This point of honour in the merchant against the money-changer and usurer, urges him to those glaring outbursts of hatred, when he rates Shylock in the Rialto about his usances, calls him a dog, foots him, and spits upon his beard. For this he receives a lesson for life in his lawsuit with the Jew, which with his apathetic negligence he allows to run ahead of him. The danger of life seizes him, and the apparently insensible

man is suddenly drawn closer to us; he is suffering, so that high and low intercede for him; he himself petitions Shylock; his situation weakens him; the experience is not lost for him; it is a crisis, it is the creation of a new life for him; finally, when he is lord and master over Shylock, he rakes up no more his old hatred against him, and in Bassanio's happiness and tried friendship there lies henceforth for the man roused from his apathy, the source of renovated and ennobled existence.

Unacquainted with this friend of Bassanio's, there lives at Belmont his beloved Portia, the contrast to Antonio, upon whom Shakespeare has not hesitated to heap all the active qualities, of which he has deprived Antonio; for in the womanly being kept modestly in the background, these qualities will not appear so overwhelmingly prominent, as we felt that, united in the man, they would have raised him too far above the other characters of the piece. Nevertheless Portia is the most important figure in our drama, and she forms even its true central point, as for her sake, without her fault or knowledge, the knot is entangled, and through her and in her conscious effort it is also loosened. She is just as royally rich as Antonio, and as he is encompassed with parasites, so is she by suitors from all lands. She too, like Antonio, and more than he, is wholly free from every disturbing influence of her possessions upon her inner being. She carries out her father's will, in order to secure herself from a husband, who might purchase her beauty by the weight. Without this will, she was of herself of the same mind; wooed by princely suitors, she loves Bassanio, whom she knew to be utterly poor. She too, like Antonio, is melancholy, but not from spleen, not from

apathy, not without cause, not from that ennui of riches, but just from passion, from her love for Bassanio, from care for the doubtful issue of that choice, which threatens to betray her love to chance. A completely superior nature, she stands above Antonio and Bassanio, as Helena above Bertram, more than Rosaline above Biron and Juliet above Romeo: it seems that Shakespeare at that time created and endowed his female characters in the conviction, that the woman was fashioned out of better material than the man. On account of the purity of her nature, she is compared to the image of a saint, on account of the strength of her will to Brutus' Portia; Jessica speaks of her as without her fellow in the world, giving to her husband the joys of heaven upon earth. The most beautiful and the most contradictory qualities, manly determination and womanly tenderness, are blended together in her. She is musical and energetic, playful and serious; she is at once cheerful and devout, not devout before, but after action; and even her society is so chosen; her friend Nerissa is of the same nature, full of raillery and playfulness, but of such vigorous power, and so much attached to Portia, that she only promises her hand to Gratiano in case Bassanio's choice has a successful issue. To this man of her heart Portia represents herself as a rough jewel, although she is far superior to him; she gives herself to him with the most womanly modesty, although she is capable rather of guiding him. She is superior to all circumstances, that is her highest praise; she would have accommodated herself to any husband, for this reason her father might have felt himself justified in prescribing the lottery; he could do so with the most implicit confidence; she knows the contents of the caskets, but she betrays it

not. Once she has sent from her eyes speechless messages to Bassanio, and now she would gladly entertain him some months before he chooses, that she may at least secure a short possession; but no hint from her facilitates his election. And yet she has to struggle with the warm feeling, which longs to transgress the will: it is a temptation to her, but she resists it with honour and resolution. Only, quick in judgment, skilled in the knowledge of men, and firm in her treatment, she knows how to frighten away the utterly worthless lovers* by her behaviour; so superior is she in all this, that her subsequent appearance as judge is perfectly conceivable. Famous actresses, such as Mrs. Clive in Garrick's time, have used this judgment-scene as a burlesque to laugh at, a part in which the highest pathos is at work, and an exalted character pursues the most pure and sacred object.

Between both, Portia and Antonio, stands Bassanio, the friend of the one, the lover of the other, utterly poor between the two boundlessly rich, ruined in his circumstances, inconsiderate, extravagant at the expense of his friend. He seems quite to belong to the parasitical class of Antonio's friends. In disposition he is more inclined to the merry Gratiano than to Antonio's severe gravity; he appears on the stage with the question — "When shall we laugh?" and he joins with his frivolous companions in all cheerful and careless folly. This time he borrows once more three thousand ducats, to make a strange Argonautic

* Portia's humorous review of them must have rested on an inclination common at the time to ridicule in this manner the characters of foreign nations, since Sully puts quite a similar review in the mouth of his Henry IV.

expedition to the Golden Fleece, staking them on a blind adventure, the doubtful wooing of a rich heiress. His friend breaks his habit of never borrowing on credit, he enters into an agreement with the Jew upon the bloody condition, and the adventurer accepts the loan with the sacrifice. And before he sets forth, even on the same day and evening, he purchases fine livery for his servants with this money, and gives a merry feast as a farewell, during which the daughter of the invited Jew is to be carried off by one of the free-thinking fellows. Is not the whole, as if he were only the seeming friend of this rich man, that he might borrow his money, and only the seeming lover of this rich lady, that he might pay his debts with her money?

But this quiet Antonio seemed to know the man of bad appearance to be of better nature. He knew him indeed as somewhat too extravagant but not incurably so, as one who was ready and able even to restrict himself. He knew him as one who stood "within the eye of honour", and he lent to him, without a doubt of his integrity. His confidence was unlimited, and he blames him rather that he should "make question of his uttermost", than if he had made waste of all he has. In his melancholy, it is this man alone who chains him to the world; their friendship needs no brilliant words, it is unfeignedly genuine. His eyes, full of tears at parting, tell Bassanio, what he is worth to Antonio; it is just the acceptance of the loan which satisfies Antonio's confidence. The down-right and regardless Gratiano, whose jests, faultless to his friend, are an offence to the world, he enjoins seriously as to behaviour and habits in his courting expedition to the noble Portia, and that parting supper helped to a virtuous sin, in withdrawing the loveliest

daughter from the most unnatural father. When he comes to Portia, he accedes not to her tender womanly proposal that he should safely enjoy two months' intercourse with her; he will not live upon the rack, and he insists with manly resolution upon the decision. His choice, the very motives of his choice, exhibit him as the man not of show, but of genuine nature; his significant speech upon this fundamental theme of the piece stands here in the true centre of the play. The scene of his choice, accompanied by music and followed by Portia's anxious glances and torturing agony, must be seen to be enjoyed: the amiability and sincerity of both is here in its greatest glory. When he perceives the portrait, he devines indeed his happiness, but he ventures not yet to hope it, and in spite of his agitation he seems absorbed only with the work of art; when the scroll announces to him his triumph, (a flourish of instruments will set forth his words in their true light) he will nevertheless first obtain confirmation from the original, and she who had before followed tremblingly every movement, recovers her composure at the happy decision, and in language full of womanly devotion recalls the man to himself, dazzled as he is by his good fortune.

Bassanio's choice is crowned by success, or more justly: his wise consideration of the father's object and of the mysterious problem, meets with its deserved reward. But his beautiful doctrine of show is to be tested immediately, whether it be really deed and truth. His adventurous expedition has succeeded through his friend's assistance and loan. But at the same moment, in which he is at the climax of his happiness, his friend is at the climax of misfortune and in the utmost danger of his life, and this from the very

assistance and loan, which have helped Bassanio to his success. In the very prime of his wedding happiness the horror of the intelligence concerning Antonio occurs. Now the genuineness of the friend shows itself. The intelligence disturbs his whole nature. He goes on his wedding-day — Portia herself permits not, that they should be married first, — to save his friend, to pay thrice the money borrowed, in the hope of being able to turn aside the law in this case of necessity. But Portia proves even here her superior nature. She sees more keenly, what an inevitable snare the inhuman Jew has dug for Antonio; she adopts the surest idea, of saving him by right and law itself; she had at the same time a plan for testing the man of her love. Even with this, the idea of the design of the whole piece concurs most closely. Her own choice had been denied her by her father's arrangement; her delight in Bassanio rested not on a long acquaintance; the alliance made by chance appears to her to acquire its true consecration and security by one solemn trial; she will test him and his friend, she will test him by his friendship. She conceives the friendship of her husband, as brides so readily do, in the most ideal manner; Lorenzo praises her noble conception of friendship, even before he knows what she has done; she wishes to convince herself of the nature of this friendship, in order that she may conclude from it the nature of Bassanio's love. She saves her friend from despair, and his friend from death, at the same moment that amid their torments she is observing their value. Antonio has in this catastrophe to atone for all that he had sinned against Shylock through sternness, Bassanio for all that of which he was guilty through frivolity, extravagance, and participation in the offences

against the Jew: the best part of both is exhibited through their sufferings in their love for each other, and Antonio's words, the seal of this friendship, must have penetrated deeply into Portia's heart. But with equally great agitation she hears the words of Bassanio, that he would sacrifice his wife, his latest happiness, to avert the misfortune which he had caused. This disregard of her must enchant her: this was standing the fiery test. Whilst she turns the words into a jest, she has the deepest emotion to overcome: with those words, the sin is forgiven of which Bassanio was guilty. By his readiness for this sacrifice he first deserves the friend, whom he had brought near to death through the wooing of this wife and the means of pressing his suit, which Antonio had given him; and by this also he first deserves his wife, who could not be called happily won by a fortunate chance, which was at once the evil destiny of his friend. This trial of Bassanio is carried on by Portia in the last act of the piece. It has always been said of this act, that it was added for the satisfaction of an æsthetic necessity, to efface the painful impression of the judgment-scene, but it serves at once also to satisfy the moral interest, by a last proof of the genuineness of this friendship. The helpful judge demands from Bassanio, as a reward, the ring, which his wife had forbidden him to give away. Antonio himself begs him to give the ring, and places his friendship in the scale against his wife's commandment; love and friendship come into a final collision, amusing to the spectator, but most serious to those tested by it: friendship must carry the day, if love is to be genuine. He puts his wife after his friend, because he obtained his wife only by means of his friend. And he proves thus in an emergency

which placed a painful choice before him, that he was in earnest in those words, that he would sacrifice his wife to his friend, that his friend might not fall a sacrifice to his wife. He proves in this severe Brutus-like sentence against that which was his dearest treasure, that he is worthy of this Portia.

These are the several characteristics of the noblest circumstances, relations, and intricacies between man and man, between worth and possession. Shylock is the contrast, which we hardly need explain, although indeed in this age of degeneration of art and morals, lowness and madness could go so far as to make a martyr on the stage of this outcast of humanity. The poet has certainly given to this character, in order that he may not sink quite below our interest, a perception of his paria-condition, and has imputed his outbursts of hatred against Christians and aristocrats, partly to genuine grounds of annoyance. Moreover he has not delineated the usurer from the hatred of the Christians of that time against all that was Jewish, else he would not have imparted to Jessica her lovely character. But of the emancipation of the Jew he knew indeed nothing, and least of all of the emancipation of this Jew, whom Burbadge in Shakespeare's time acted in a character frightful also in exterior, with long nose and red hair, and whose inward deformity, whose hardened nature, is far less determined by religious bigotry, than by the most terrible of all fanaticism, that of avarice and usury. He hates indeed the Christians as Christians, and therefore Antonio who has mistreated him; but he hates him far more, because by disinterestedness, by what he calls "low simplicity", he destroys his business, because he lends out money gratis, brings

down the rate of usance, and has lost him half a million. Riches have made him the greatest contrast to that which they have rendered Antonio, who throughout appears indifferent, incautious, careless, and generous. Shylock on the other hand is meanly careful, cautiously circumspect, systematically quiet, ever inwardly shufflingly occupied, like the genuine son of his race, disdaining not the most contemptible means, nor the most contemptible object, speculating in the gaining of a penny, looking so far into the future and into small results, that he sends the greedy Launcelot into Bassanio's service, and against his principle he eats at night at Bassanio's house, only for the sake of feeding upon the prodigal Christian. This trait is given to him by the poet in a truly masterly manner, in order subsequently to explain the barbarous condition, on which he lends Antonio that fatal sum. Shakespeare after his habit has done the utmost, to give probability to this most improbable degree of cruelty, which, according to Bacon's words, appears in itself to every good mind, a fabulous tragic fiction. Antonio has mistreated him; at the moment of the loan he was like to mistreat him again; he challenges him to lend it as to an enemy; he almost suggests to him the idea, which the Jew places, as if jestingly, as a condition of the loan; and he, the man railed at for usury, will now generously grant it without interest, to the man who never borrowed upon advantage. The same crafty speculation and prospect which, at all events, is attended with one advantage, underlies this idea: in one case the show of disinterestedness, in the other the opportunity for a fearful revenge. Had the Jew really only partially trifled with the idea of such a revenge, the poet does everything to make the jest

fearfully earnest. Money had effaced everything human from the heart of this man, he knows nothing of religion and moral law, but when he quotes the Bible in justification of his usury; he knows of no mercy, but to which he can be compelled; nothing of justice and mercy dwells in him, nothing of the affection of kindred. His daughter is carried away from him; he is furious, not because he is robbed of her, but because she has robbed him in her flight; he would see his daughter dead at his feet, provided that the jewels and gems were in her ears; he would see her hearsed before him, provided the ducats were in her coffin. He regrets the money employed in her pursuit; when he hears of her extravagance, the irretrievable loss of his ducats occasions fresh rage. In this condition he pants for revenge against Antonio, even before there is any prospect of it, against the man, who by long mortifications had stirred up rage and hatred in the bosom of the Jew, and with whose removal his usury would be without an adversary. Obduracy and callousness continue to progress in him, until at the pitch of his wickedness he falls into the pit he had dug, and then, according to the notions of the age, learns from the actions of Antonio and of the Duke, how mercy in a Christian spirit produces other actions, than the unmerciful god of the world, who imposed upon him its laws alone. This awful picture of the effects of a thirst for possession, however strongly it is exhibited, will appear as no caricature to him, who has ever stumbled upon similar evidences in the actual world, in the histories of gamblers and misers.

The sense, which we have now given to the Merchant of Venice, perfectly coincides with all, even the subordinate characters of the piece. Thus it is with the self-interested

suitors of Portia, who, corrupted by glitter and show, choose amiss. Thus is it also with the parasitical companions of Antonio, who forsake him with his fortune, those loquacious half-friends, who forebode his danger before he does, and do not even write to Bassanio. Thus again, with Lorenzo and Jessica, an extravagant, giddy couple, who free from restraint, squander their pilfered gold in Genoa, and give it away for monkeys, and reach Belmont like famished people. The little Jessica is placed no higher by the poet, than she could be without a mother in the society of Shylock and Launcelot, with a mind entirely childlike, naive, true, and spotless, and if we may trust Lorenzo's words and her sure perception of the greatness of Portia, with a capacity for true wisdom. Thus as she is, she is thoroughly a modest child, whom on the threshold of moral consciousness, unnatural circumstances have driven to feel ashamed of her father, to fly from him concealed in boy's clothes, a dress painful to her easily excited modesty. Thus delicately feminine, she has no scruples of conscience, to steal herself the ducats and the jewels of her father. A new relation to possession is brought to view in this nature: it is that of the inexperienced child, who is quite unacquainted with the value of money, who innocently throws it away in trifles, having learnt in her paternal home neither domestic habits nor economy. In this, Lorenzo is only too congenial with her, although he would have her believe, that he was as a man, what Portia is as a woman; Antonio, who knows them better, takes both under his guardianship, and manages their inheritance for them. Launcelot also bears a relation to the common idea of the piece. Greedy and rough as he is,

he also has an inclination to want economy; thus as he knows Bassanio, he would live better in the house of the Jew, but out of a sense of honour, he would rather go to the generous poor man, than remain with the rich miser. Otherwise the scene with his father, as we have already pointed out, is exhibited in parodic contrast to Jessica's relation to hers. The emphasis of that scene lies in the words that the son of a father must ever come to light, that childlike feeling can never be renounced, not even by so coarse and blunt a fellow as this. How much more should this be with a being so ethereal as Jessica! But that it is not so, is the strongest shadow thrown by the poet upon Shylock; he has intended by this to cast none upon Jessica. "She is damn'd," says Shylock. "That's certain, if the devil may be her judge," answers Salarino.

II. HISTORICAL PIECES.

We have gone through the group of erotic plays belonging to the second period of Shakespeare's dramatic poetry, and we turn now to the group of histories, which is arranged according to time in the following manner. Richard III., which is closely linked by its subject with the three parts of Henry VI., which we have discussed, stands also as to time the first of Shakespeare's independent histories. The composition of the last parts of Henry VI. occurs not long before 1592; Collier places Richard III. in 1593, later editors assume that it was written somewhat later, not long before the first publication of the piece (1597). To the tetralogy thus completed of the rise and fall of the house of York, Shakespeare then opposed the tetralogy of the rise of the House of Lancaster: Richard II., printed likewise in 1597, must have been written between Richard III. and Henry IV., certainly not long after the earlier piece; the two parts of Henry IV. between 1597—98, Henry V. in 1599. King John is distinct as to subject and purport from this series; as to the time of its origin, it belongs to this second period of the poet's writings (before 1598).

Henry VIII. alone belongs to the third period, and from this and other grounds will be discussed in another place.

The poet here moves in a clearly opposite sphere. Hitherto we have seen him in the range of private life, of personal existence, insinuating himself into the internal history of single beings, or occupied with the productions of their brains; here, in this series of historical pieces, he is in the wide outward sphere of public life, deeply engaged with states and histories, and stirred by thoughts political and national, not merely by moral ideas and psychological truths. And in this field of action and noble ambition, the poet shows himself no less at ease than in the regions of man's internal life of thought and feeling. Fettered by historical tradition and by the sober reality of the subject, he is as a poet no less great than in the fantastic creations of the comedies, which are his own invention. The boundless scope, that this two-fold diffusion of the mind of Shakespeare gave to his poetry, lies before us; the superiority of human endowments, which his two-sided nature expresses, we shall only endeavour to illustrate by a single comparison, easily understood by us Germans. It was Goethe's repeated complaint, that in his German society, the great historical and political life in which Shakespeare moved, was missing, that the great market of popular intercourse, which might have accustomed him early to a comprehensive historical survey, was lacking; and we must indeed acknowledge that under this want, his poetic genius, however great we esteem it, became contracted and stunted, and remained below the measure of that which, under other circumstances, it would have accomplished and effected. That which Shakespeare united in himself, we

possess, but divided between our two dramatists: the great historical life of outward action in the historical dramas of Schiller, to whom the sensitive side of men was not revealed from such rich and pure experiences as Goethe, and on the other hand the inner life of the individual soul in Goethe, to whom on the reverse, history was strange and unfamiliar. By this division, the life of thought and feeling, the world of sentiments and ideas, in the poems of the one, is generally deprived of the great background of national or political life, upon which Shakespeare almost always placed his pictures of private and individual life; and in the historical pieces of the other, we miss the psychological many-sidedness and the fulness of the individual, which is never wanting in Shakespeare's histories. We possess a whole in two halves, which is far from being the same as possessing the whole as a whole. For, from this reason we split into parties under two writers, while England belongs whole and undivided to this one; we delude ourselves in the passion of this party feeling for the one, whilst the nature and being of both taken together, alone constitutes the image of a perfect humanity, most worthy of devotion.

If we consider the series of the historical dramas in themselves, and seek for their merits as belonging to a different style of dramatic writing, their national and political importance is the first thing which strikes us. The English possess in this group of plays, as Schlegel said, a great dramatic epopee, with which no other nation has aught to compare. Almost all historical plays, even the non-Shakespeare ones included, the material for which is taken from English history, were created by the English stage in not

much more than one decade, in the happiest moment of the happy age of Elizabeth, when a rare national elevation pervaded the whole English people. Previous to her reign, the national feeling of England had strengthened for the first time, and its knightly fame, in an age, when nations were still unacquainted with each other, had penetrated throughout all Europe, when the small island people had victoriously stood in the midst of France, under the rule of Edward III. and Henry V. Subsequently its power and its self-reliance had utterly declined through internal party strife and the loss of former conquests, only to recover itself slowly since Henry VII. It was not until Elizabeth's time that English history again assumed an aspect, which reminded the masses of their fatherland, and again offered food for national feeling. The honoured queen was mistress over the arms and the intrigues of her enemies, — France, the Pope, and Spain, — and fortune wonderfully met her merits; the English people learned to feel themselves on the superior ground of Protestantism compared to the dark religion of Spain; the English maritime force was at that time really first established, and exulted at the outset in the most promising victories. If we trace the effects of these public political circumstances upon the literature of England, we come first of all upon our historical dramas. How in Shakespeare's *King John* and in the older drama upon which it rests, protestant self-reliance is mirrored, and how surely and stoutly in *Henry VIII.* are those supports praised, which procured the first entrance of the true worship of God in England. How eloquently in *Richard II.*, in *Henry V.* and *VI.*, not alone does the patriotic spirit of the poet speak, but also the self-conceit of a people who have again learned

to know themselves in the midst of successful events. How does the political heart throb, how repeatedly in Shakespeare is that counsel of Themistocles advanced, which enjoins on England to place all her power and confidence on her coast and her vessels, a counsel which has been repeated unnumbered times by orators in Parliament with Shakespearian quotations. The whole age influenced the creation and the spirit of these historical pieces, and these again had a corresponding influence upon the patriotic spirit of the people. It is still the chief design of these works, to remind the English people of the earlier period of their political greatness, and to bring again before them their Edwards, their Henrys, their Talbots, and the terrors of the French. But of how much consequence this must have been in an age, when the self-forgetfulness of nations was general, when few read history, is obvious in itself. A national history, not even to be read, but to be looked at, which now galled by the representation of shameful discords and defeats, now raised and animated by the description of great deeds of old, what a possession must this have been at that time, for a revived imaginative people, when still later, when even at the present day, these pieces have preserved the same signification, when statesmen like Marlborough and Chatham acknowledge of themselves, that Shakespeare was the first source of their knowledge of English history. "What English blood", exclaims Thomas Heywood in his *Apology for Actors* (1612), "seeing the person of any bold Englishman presented in our national histories, and doth not hug his fame and cherish his valor, pursuing him in his enterprise with his best wishes, as if the personator were the man personated? What coward to see his countryman

valiant, would not be ashamed of his own cowardice? What English prince, should he behold Henry V., or the pourtrature of that famous Edward III., foraging France, taking so great a king captive in his own country, would not be suddenly inflamed with so royal a spectacle!" "Where is the man", he writes in another passage, "where is the man of that weak capacity that cannot discourse of any notable thing recorded even from William the Conqueror, nay from the landing of Brutus until this day? For the historical plays teach history to those who cannot read it in the chronicles, these plays are written with this aim, to teach subjects obedience, to represent the untimely ends of such as have moved insurrections, and the flourishing estate of such as prove themselves faithful and keep clear of traitorous stratagems".

This common political and patriotic significance of these pieces is far greater than their historical value in itself. W. Schlegel went so far as to say, that "in Shakespeare's histories the leading features of events were so faithfully conceived, their causes and even their secret motives so clearly penetrated, that the truth of history might be learned from them". It is in no wise so; and this indeed for one reason. The exact features of history and the true motives of actions, we learn throughout only from the most conscientious comparison and examination of all possible contemporaneous sources. But Shakespeare was far from taking upon himself this business of the historian, and he has only wisely acted. He has essentially followed only one single authority, Holinshed's Chronicle, which appeared in 1577 in two folio volumes, and in an enlarged edition in 1586—87. How he made use of this authority and of few other historical sources, how far he adhered to it, or

departed from it, Courtenay has separately pointed out in his commentaries on the historical plays of Shakespeare (1840), and he comes to the conclusion that the historical value of these pieces must not be too highly estimated, a conclusion which is not derogatory to the poet, but much rather brings him only greater honour. Shakespeare has had but one law in the using of each and all of his sources, a law which he applied equally to the driest historical chronicle as to the most fantastic novel: he sought after nature and inner truth; and this he took possession of as his property wherever he found it, and the opposite he rejected whatever authority might hold it out to him. He found in Plutarch historical traits and motives in the simple nature of antiquity, such as were unconditionally agreeable to his human manner of reflection, and he transcribed them exactly with remarkable self-denial in his Roman pieces; he found on the other hand a crude circumstance without motive in a legendary fragment of prince Hamlet, and from it with self-inventive power he formed that profound poem out of actions and motives, which must entirely be regarded as his property; in a middle degree of availability between these two sources, he found historical annals in Holinshed intermixed with uncertain legends and myths, and he observed towards this chronicle throughout the same conduct, which ever modified, according to the nature of the sources put before him, the freedom and constraint of his use of them. He shifted together a series of facts which displayed a unity of action, he respected the law of inward truth, not that of chronology nor all that which may be called outward truth; he included different actions under the same cause and referred them to the same author, that he might

avail himself of the riches of history, without renouncing unity of action; he rejected other facts, which suited not this unity. The historian has to take care of trying to guess at the motives of men from sources like Holinshed's chronicle; to invent them would be on his side a perfect mistaking of his science and its object; but it is just here in these secret precincts of history, that Shakespeare penetrates boldly with that pragmatic method peculiar to the poet. Where the historian, bound by an oath to the severest truth in every single statement, may at the most permit us to divine the causes of events and the motives of actions, from the bare narration of facts, the poet, who seeks to draw from these facts only a general moral truth and not one of fact, unites by poetic fiction the actions and the actors, in a distinct living relation of cause and effect. The more freely and boldly he does this, as Shakespeare in Richard III., the more poetically interesting will his treatment of the history become, but the more will it lose its historical value; the more truly and closely he adheres to reality, as in Richard II., the more will his poetry gain in historical meaning and forfeit in poetic splendour. Shakespeare has even here prescribed no rigid rule once for ever; he allowed himself to be influenced by the nature of the subject, sometimes to the more free, sometimes to the more fettered mode of treatment. Only to one law does he appear to adhere throughout this class: that in his design of a poetical organization of a historical subject, he does not interweave, as Schiller did, imaginary actions, which interfere with the historical connection of events, without in any way belonging to the history. In Henry IV., where he went furthest in this respect, it was

in the endowment of one especial individualized character, like Henry V., when the ethical aim surpassed the political and historical; but even then these additions interfere not really with the historical events. It is a common pride on the part of the poets of these histories, and a natural peculiarity belonging to this branch, that truth and poetry should go hand in hand. It is more than probable that Henry VIII. bore earlier the title characteristic in this respect: *All is True*. But this truth is throughout, as we discover, not to be taken in the prosaic sense of the historian, who seeks it in the historical material in the smallest particulars and according to its most different sides; but it is only one higher and universal truth, which is gathered by the poet from a series of historical facts, yet which from this very circumstance, that it springs from historical, true, and actual facts, and is supported and upheld by them, acquires, it must be admitted, a double authority, that of poetry and of history at the same time. The historical drama, formed of these two component parts, will be therefore most agreeable to the imaginative friend of history and to the realistic friend of poetry.

Considered from this aspect, it has been a strange fancy of our Romanticists that they make a show of wishing to raise these histories of Shakespeare above all his other works, they, who however were so little inclined to realistic poetry. A series of these pieces is certainly read with as much pleasure as the more independent tragedies of Shakespeare, but perhaps only because a psychologically interesting character, as in *Richard III.*, or just because non-historical elements, as in *Henry IV.*, form the attraction. A severe line of division and boundary between history and

independent drama, Shakespeare has not drawn; many of these pieces from the favourable nature of the material or the greatness of the poet, have become tragedies, to which every æsthetic rule may be applied, and from which therefore a pure artistic enjoyment may be claimed. But just there, where the history is the purest as in *Richard III.*, we have to work our way through heavy matter, which appears to check the flight of the poet as well as our own, which must be mastered almost by historical study, but when it is mastered, presents, it must be admitted, a new and increasing enjoyment, such as we seek for in vain in dramas not historical. Before we consider Shakespeare's histories separately, we will endeavour to premise wherein lies this double quality, which the historical matter affords to this branch of the drama, matter, which on the one hand adds an intellectual value to it, and on the other detracts from its æsthetic merit.

With regard first to the latter point, the historical truth inspires the poet with such great awe, he feels himself so constrained by it, that he forfeits by this means at least freedom of choice, and much also of freedom of treatment. When he sought material among the tales and myths of the middle ages, his choice was incomparably more extensive and he could ever grasp the boldest poetical subject; the motives were moreover fully placed in his hand. But in the history of his fatherland, a subject like *Henry V.* had often great weight historically, while poetically it was very empty; causes and motives were here frequently dictated with the fact. To give to the historical story a charm like that of the myth and legend, which is poetic in its origin, and that elasticity, upon the strength of which a freely invented

story rises to an exciting catastrophe, and that interest, which lies in a fascinating plot, this is only possible to the poet when, as in *Macbeth*, he has before him a historical myth, that is to say, no strictly historical matter; it is at best possible in single rare cases, when history strikingly harmonizes with poetry. But in the common course of history, it presents only the daily detail of actual life and is destitute of the poetic stimulant. For that most perfect drama in which, according to Aristotle, a fascinating entanglement and its solution, a misunderstanding and its explanation, are entwined in the action, where, in consequence of this entanglement, a sudden change from happiness to misfortune, or from misfortune to happiness, occurs, — for this most poetic dramatic creation, history very rarely presents a favourable subject. It is not the happy exciting arrangement of facts, so artistically calculated to act upon sympathy and fear, which in *Henry V.*, in *Henry VI.*, and in *Richard II.*, is the prevailing charm, partly resting in its poetic form; the course of the action is rather plain and smooth, its elevating character lies in the greatness of the facts, in the subject more than in the form, and that which is especially attractive, is the historical value of the matter. As with the story, so is it with the characters. A series of historical facts might present to the poet a truth worthy of handling, but it linked it not with characters, which carried about them the alluring splendour of poetry, romance, and heroism; this withheld him not from writing a poem of the history of *Henry V.*, who is not a character of imposing pathos, nor of tragic effect, but whose life runs rather in the quiet flow of the epos, and displays an ethical nature, the unpretending greatness of which can however just as much attract the thoughtful reader,

as the highly excited passion of a Macbeth or an Othello. And as it is with the story and the characters, so is it with the representation. History is often only a combination of given facts and their given causes, a dramatized chronicle. The scenes which carry on the political action, are destitute of the attraction of poetic diction, often even of individual and exact characteristics on the part of the actors. If indeed we examine closer, we shall find how, even here, the psychological deficiencies of the chronicle have been acutely and wisely supplied, and how the apparently slight work of the versification of historical scenes is rich in inner difficulty. Thus the diction of these historical pieces is less poetically elevated, the sober matter of reality fetters the wings of poetic language; but even on this point we can perceive a great advantage, which the substantial nature of these pieces has conferred on English dramatic poetry; it led away from rhyme, from the style of conceits and antitheses, from all the false tinsel of poetry, and it is evident that Shakespeare, only when he was passing through this school and after he had finished it, acquired his perfect manner of dramatic representation. Gathering all together, it follows from what we have said, and without this analysis every one feels it, that the poetical charm of these historical pieces is inferior to that of Shakespeare's independent dramas, from natural causes which belong to the historical material; but that this very historical material evidences another peculiar merit, to which non-historical dramas can lay less claim. It now remains to exhibit this merit more distinctly.

In contrast to the historical play, the free poetic drama may be regarded, on the point of material, as the private domestic play, in which one common moral idea rules, expanded

in the other into a political. The persons of the non-historical drama act in moral responsibility, as it were, only towards themselves and the small circle near them, whom their deeds affect; the historical characters on the other hand bear a wider political responsibility, while their actions influence an incomparably wider circle. The conduct of men, to whom the management of the state is entrusted, concerns whole countries and peoples, and extends its influence far beyond the time, which their own life comprehends. If by happy selection or invention, the story of a non-historical drama receives in its delineation of gigantic passions a boundless *depth* and *intrinsic* value, — a happily chosen historical story possesses, on the other hand, by nature a boundless *comprehensiveness* and a *wider* value, dependent on the extent of the back-ground, both as regards time and space, that is to say, upon the historical ground itself, which, therefore, no non-historical drama can present. It is this wide-spread responsibility, this extensive agency of the political actor, which has compelled the acceptance of another moral law, of another moral standard for history, than that relating to private life. In public life, faults are amplified into vices, and crimes again softened into pardonable faults, by the mere measure of greater circumstances. With less sympathy do we look in the historical world, upon individuals who fall as a sacrifice, when their fall profits the whole community; we look on those who sacrifice them, with moderated blame, when they appear as the vehicle for higher aims. On the other hand, weakness of character in private life often appears only a laughable, inoffensive, indeed even a beneficial fault: but in Henry VI. we have seen that upon the throne, it is equal in the scale to the

fearful weight of the most frightful crimes, because it disturbs and destroys a whole state. To Brackenburgh in Egmont, Goethe probably wished to give with the name the same disposition of character, which Brackenbury bears in Richard III.; this one comparison between the pitiable weak prey to love and the detestable passive instrument of Richard's bloody schemes, teaches at one glance what a far more extensive interest, the mere public and political position bestows upon the same human nature, which in domestic life may appear in a wholly different light. This enlarged sphere, this greater ethical standard, the poet obtains by entering the historical world, by gathering the breadth of history within the narrow limits of the drama. Shakespeare knew besides this, no positive law which suited all cases. His comprehensive eye, therefore, was naturally attracted by these materials, which showed him the work and conduct of man in an entirely new view. He found ideas in these materials which were capable of a poetic mode of contemplation, and were of quite another nature to that which the common tragedies and comedies presented; the thoughts which strike us in these pieces, are not merely generally of a moral, but at the same time of a political nature. They are as such, not capable of the most severe formal concentration; their representation required and necessitated a greater succession of circumstances and changes, which can alone render perceptible to the senses the results of political actions; if it were conceivable that a poet should catch a political idea, without being excited by the history, he would be obliged to invent a wide historical sphere, in order to render obvious the nature of political actions and their wide-spreading effects. Nothing is, therefore, more natural

than that Shakespeare found the scope of one drama too narrow for his dramatic treatment of history, and that his histories twice grouped themselves into tetralogies, both of which work upon the same idea, which in a less lengthened material had only been imperfectly rendered perceptible. The representation of such ideas, as step beyond the domestic circle, of such characters as those, whose moral development requires just as much breadth as the passionate nature of tragic characters demands depth, of such actions as are incapable of compression into one catastrophe and require more epic fulness, this has Shakespeare furnished in his histories, and has thus enriched dramatic poetry with a new species, which offers to the serious reader less poetic enjoyment, but more ample matter for reflection.

We have before laid stress on the fact, when we discussed Henry VI., that Shakespeare, even when he elaborated these pieces after Greene's original, surveyed already, as a whole, the history of the strife of the red and white Roses, penetrated the poetic value of these events, and probably even at that first commencement conceived the double plan, first of all to bring to an end the tragic decline of the house of York, adding Richard III. to the last part of Henry VI.; but then to place in opposition to this tetralogy, the other of the rise of the house of Lancaster. We said there also, that the idea which rules the whole cycle of these eight pieces, is the question, in what relation the claims of the hereditary right of the incapable, however good, who endanger throne and fatherland, stand to the claims of the merit of the capable, however bad, if they save and maintain the state. We will give our attention to this subject, considering first of all the close of the York tragedy, Richard III.

RICHARD III.

It has before been incidentally mentioned that a Latin drama upon Richard III. was performed at Cambridge by Dr. Legge before 1583, and that an English tragedy, "the true tragedy of Richard III.", appeared in print in 1594, but which indeed may have been written about the year 1588. Both are published in the writings of the Shakespeare society; the first is an exercise of style and verse extended into three parts, which reminds us here and there of Shakespeare's work, only because the author uses the same historical source; the insignificant English piece, on the contrary, must have been known to Shakespeare, although his work scarcely shows one reminiscence of it. Richard III. is Shakespeare's first tragedy of undoubted personal authorship; it is written in connection with Henry VI. as its direct continuation. The opening scene, in which Richard reflects upon his path, is the sequel to the similar soliloquy in Henry VI. (Part III. Act III. sc. 2.). In many touches of character, the poet refers to that piece; Richard's plan of casting suspicion upon Clarence is prepared there; the whole position of the aged Margaret falls back upon the curse, which York pronounced against her in Henry VI. (Part III.

Act I. sc. 4.). Yet here, as in Henry VI., the pure dramatic form is not so universally adhered to, as in Richard II. which immediately follows. In the scenes, where the trilogy of the common lamentation of the women (Act II. sc. 2. and Act IV. sc. 1.) changes like a chorus, dramatic truth is sacrificed to the lyric or epic form, and to conceits in the style of the pastoral Italian poetry; these scenes call to mind directly the passages in Henry VI., where the murderers of father and son lament over the slain. The form of these scenes (*στυχομυθία*) is borrowed from the ancient drama, of which the older plays of Shakespeare repeatedly remind us. Thus the treatment also of Dira, of the uttered curse and its fulfilment, is quite in the spirit of antiquity; and here again the clumsy amassing of the curses of that fearful Margaret, betrays the incipient tragic poet. With all this, Richard III. compared to Henry VI. shows extraordinary progress. Even in his knowledge of the historical facts, Shakespeare is here more exact and certain than his predecessor in Henry VI., upon whom in that play he had shewn no improvement on this point; the conformity to the chronicle in all actions taken from it, and comprising a time of fourteen years, is extraordinarily true. The poetic diction, however much it reminds of Henry VI., has gained surprisingly in finish, richness, and truth; we need only compare with the best parts of Henry VI. the words of Anne at the very beginning (Act I., sc. 2.), to find how thoroughly they are animated with the breath of extreme passion, how pure and natural is their flow, the expression being but the echo of the feeling. In the design of his characters, he has richly advanced in variety and individual acuteness; with such scanty means to bring forward, in colours so living and

agreeable, such complete types of character as the two princes, Shakespeare himself has not often again succeeded in doing. But even in this characterization, we still meet with the property peculiar to Shakespeare's earlier works, that it is plain, open, over-evident: whilst immediately afterwards in *Richard II.* appears the inclination to conceal as deeply as possible the key to the characters. That which, in conclusion, speaks most from internal evidence for the comparatively early origin of *Richard III.*, is the abundance in this tragedy of tragic motives and moments, the accumulation of bloody crimes, which the poet has imputed to the hero, partly without the warrant of historical testimony, and the bitter severity with which he develops the historical circumstances: how he shows the dreadful results of civil war on a base and ruined house, and how on its ruin, the most depraved among the depraved elevates himself, till he too is buried in the common fall.

If we would first of all more accurately understand the basis, on which Shakespeare constructs his tragedy, it will assist us much to remember the various pieces on the wars of the Roses, in their order of time. In *Richard II.*, the spoiled scion of the Black Prince stands young and feeble amid the great ambitious men of a proud and warlike nobility. In *Henry IV.*, this nobility appears in powerful contest with the new ruler. In *Henry V.*'s time, patriotic heroism has become a kind of common property. Still in the time of *Henry VI.*, those heroic forms, Talbot, Bedford, and Salisbury, are ever conspicuous; they are then lost in the struggles with France and in domestic civil wars. In *Edward IV.*'s time falls that Earl of Warwick, the last representative of the nobles of the old race, whose fall

marked out the ruin of the armed aristocracy, and the commencement of a new civil order. The peace, which succeeded to the great bloody drama of internal strife under Edward IV. is strikingly characterized by Shakespeare in the last acts of Henry VI., and in the first of Richard III. The civil war had ceased; but a domestic war in the ruling family forms a fearful sequel, and at last renders the royal palace a slaughter-house. On account of a foolish prophecy, the king prosecutes his faithful helper, his brother Clarence. The poor upstart family of his wife beset the throne greedily and with offensive arrogance, and feed the hatred, which without them was already growing up among the brothers of the house of York. Even in Henry VI., the two young brothers disdained the low inclination of the king in his union with an inferior family; in Richard III., he continues his voluptuous life with Mistress Shore, and his Hastings shares it with him. This sincere friend of the king's, who even after his death is opposed to Gloster's scheme for the young princes, is thrown into prison by the queen's relatives, and the favour alone of that amorous enchantress, who holds the king enchained, again releases him. A deadly hatred is thus sown against the friends of the queen, stirred up by Gloster, both in him and in Buckingham. In this state of things the king's sickness happens; on his death-bed, a pretended peace, as the chronicle says, behind which secret plots lurk, is made between Grey and Rivers, the relatives of the queen, and Hastings and Buckingham, their enemies. The public voice (Act II. sc. 3.) compares the bad state of things, when Henry VI. stood surrounded by so many grave counsellors and relatives solely on his father's side, with the present state, when the relatives by

father and mother oppose each other, full of emulation and envy: "by a divine instinct", — these words Shakespeare indeed found in the chronicle — "men's minds mistrust ensuing danger". The position of things, says Holinshed, and the temper of men was such, that no one could say, whom he ought to trust, whom he ought to fear. There was a universal birth of hostility and hypocrisy, of inversion and dissimulation, and Shakespeare is historically fully justified in representing the age as a bare desert in men and characters, extirpated as they had been in the immense ravages of the civil wars, and as a field ripe with intrigues and sneaking wickedness, which had grown up luxuriantly in the sudden change to peace and to Circean luxury at court. Perhaps there is nothing, which can initiate the mind so instantaneously into the historical feeling of our poet, and at once so deeply in the great moral earnestness with which he laboured at his work, than when we compare his delineation of the times of Edward IV., with the first part of the piece of this name by Thomas Heywood, in which the intercourse of the king with the tanner of Tamworth and Jane Shore, is represented as harmless, as if we had to do with a merry age and an innocent condition of society.

At this period and in such company, the fearful Gloster now appears with the dangerous consciousness of the superiority of his endowments, and at the same time with the acute penetration into the baseness and inability of the men around him. In this world, where each holds that for good which brings gain, he has learned to fashion his system out of the principle of evil; his blind ignoble self-reliance raises him above inferior minds, the pride of his

intelligence elevates him above the moral law. That the world belongs to the wise and strong, was the principle of his Machiavelli, whom the poet even in Henry VI. gave him as example and master; he saw, in the distance indeed, the throne lying before him, which he took as the aim of his ambition; he threw down the dull beings around him to serve as steps thither. All hinges upon the right understanding of this character, if the whole piece is to be understood. The English stage has at all times had the highest degree of interest in the work, for the sake of this one character. The greatest actors of England, Burbadge, Garrick, Kean, have treated this Richard as a favourite part, which even seemed especially suited to the small stature of the two first. Kemble has written a treatise upon the conception of this character. Even in Shakespeare's time, in 1614, a poet, perhaps Christopher Brooke, wrote a poem in stanzas: "the Ghost of Richard III.," which is published in the works of the Shakespeare society; he alludes with commendation to Shakespeare's tragedy. The ghost of Richard is represented, as he depicts his character, life, and end; the poem is interesting in showing, how at that period human nature was understood, and how even at that time they sought to penetrate intelligently and keenly into the soul of such a character. We, on our side, in a theme so magnificent for dramatic art, must not neglect carefully to gather together all the traits, which the poet has noted down for the just comprehension of this character.

The chronicles of Holinshed and Hall contain the life of Richard for the most part in a translation of the Latin biography of the king by Thomas Moore, who had his information probably from a contemporary, Archbishop

Morton, the same who appears in our piece as Bishop of Ely. From this source Shakespeare found the following scanty, but acute touches for the characterizing of his hero: "Richard was born with teeth, he was ugly, his left shoulder higher than his right. Wickedness, anger, envy, belonged to his nature, a quick sharp wit to his mind. He was a good captain; with large gifts he got him unstedfast friendship, for which he was fain to pill and spoil in other places, and got him steadfast hatred. Close and secret, a deep dissembler, lowly of countenance, he was at the same time imperious and arrogant of heart, disdainful even in death, outwardly companionable where he inwardly hated, not letting to kiss whom he thought to kill: despitious and cruel, not for evil will alway, but oftener for ambition and policy. If his safety or his ambition interfered, he spared neither friend nor foe". Of these traits, which appear not rarely to contradict each other, Shakespeare has not suffered one to drop, and we might say, he has not added one to them; but he has given life to the life-less touches, harmony to the contradictory, in such a manner as certainly demands the study of the most profound actor and his rarest gifts.

As the reproach of bastardy which oppresses Edmund in Lear, leads him first on the path of criminal designs, so is Richard oppressed by the unsuitableness of his ambitious mind with the deformity of his body, on account of which he was deprived from the very first even of the love of his mother, on account of which he was obliged to hear the derision of his enemies, a deformity which his shadow in the sun showed him every hour, and to descant on which was his delight. The thought gnaws him of revenging himself on the injustice of nature, by proving a villain, in order to mock

her work on his body by the deformity which he thinks to bestow on his soul. In the clatter of arms, in the time of the wars, his military glory outshone these defects of nature, and he had no leisure for descanting on them; but now, in the luxurious days of peace, when Edward and his favourites courted the Shores, military arts were no longer esteemed, and he now feels for the first time how unformed he is for the deeds of love; his ill-humour against the age whets his ill-humour over his appearance, and this again the other. His political schemes urge him however to attempt the work of love at the end of his ill-humoured reflections, and he stands the test, wooing as an agreeable bridegroom, and winning, where it seems most incredible; the poet robs him forthwith of the pretence of justifying his baseness by his ugliness. But whilst he now finds cause to rejoice in his shadow, whilst he loses that ground for self-contempt, upon which he wished to plant his villainous designs, he acquires indeed all the greater contempt of men, from the knowledge, that the young and beautiful widow of the brilliant, genuinely royal Edward of Wales yields herself in a moment to him, who not long before had murdered her lord.

If a portion of the bitterness and soured rage, that lies in Richard's nature, was rooted in this self-contempt of his outward appearance, his contempt of men on the other hand is grounded on the liberal endowment, which nature has bestowed on his mind, and on the self-reliance, which a comparison with the men around him inspired. Of consummate powers of speech, of animated mind, of piercing wit, Shakespeare depicts him throughout in accordance with the chronicle; in his hypocritical wooing of Anne, in

his sarcasm, in his equivocal language, this gift of a biting and malicious wit is called into play. A similar adroitness he exhibits in his dealings with men, and here his contempt of all, scarcely to be dissembled even by this master of dissimulation, is clearly manifested. He entraps the stupidly faithful Clarence with tears; he makes the sincere Hastings believe even to the last, that he may take every liberty with him; he leads the exasperated enemies at court to hatred and murder, whilst he remains in the back-ground; he appears tractably to follow the ambitious Buckingham, whilst he uses him as a pioneer for all his secret ways; he preys upon his enemies by means of friends and tools, whom he at once uses, and then rejects. All the Greys, the Buckinghams, the Stanleys, he regards, when the sails of his ambition are yet well filled, as inoffensive, good-natured simpletons, all in equal manner, when indeed only one of them proves himself to be so, whilst the other is found by himself subsequently to be penetrating and cunning, and the third at last catches him in the snares of his own artifices. With cruel scorn and the killing taunt of irony he allows the true-hearted Hastings to pride himself on his favour with him, while he casts him into the jaws of death; with sarcastic contempt he calls Buckingham his oracle, his prophet, when most accommodatingly he dances on his own rope; with a clumsy farce he has the crown tendered to himself by the Mayor and Aldermen, in a scene, which we can only represent, when we regard the bulk of mankind as simple spectators of the tricks, which few actors are called upon to play on the world's stage. To play the first part on this stage, the hero and the king, this has become in this despised society the goal of his ambition,

this attracts him all the more, the further that circumstances and a numerous kindred with pre-legitimate claims remove it from him.

The feeling of his mental superiority, of his political and military gifts, which makes him consciously step upon the path of crime, which renders him the ridiculer and despiser of men, makes him also a despiser of every moral law, and stamps upon him that unshackled nature, which disregards every tie of blood, every barrier of right, and every moral scruple. To regard morality and feeling, he calls in Elizabeth to be "peevish found in great designs". He calls conscience a word for cowards, devised from the beginning to hold the strong in check, and this check he has rent asunder. It is indifferent to him, when he at last is on the way to despair, what that other side of this life may bring. With this stifled conscience he appears more heartless than the murderers whom he hired for Clarence and the Princes; with frightful coolness he meditates upon the death of the "simple plain Clarence", and jests over his certain prey; he loves the obdurate mates, whom, with those words of Suffolk in Henry VI., he enjoins to despatch "this thing"; he speaks with the expression of coarse insensibility of the "fellow", the corpse of the murdered king Henry VI. Thus he spreads terror around him and practises the art of tyrants, that of making themselves feared. He uses the feeling of suspense after the first executions, in proceeding with giant steps, until he wades so deep in blood, that sin hurries him on to sin. Margaret, hungering for revenge, sees him with delight preying rapaciously, like a greedy hound, upon "the issue of his mother's body".

With this barbarity, with this wild nature, with the

soldier spirit of the man bred in war and blood, with the aristocratic pride of high birth, it seems at variance that he at the same time is endowed with the gift of consummate dissimulation, and appears now in affected humility, now in decoying amiability, now in the saintly character of the pious penitent. The chronicle indeed invests him in one breath with the qualities of a pleasing nature and of an arrogant heart; and the poet also has represented him in rapid alternations of ungoverned outbursts of rage and scorn, and then again in the gloss of the sweetest language, now in the nature and appearance of the easily sifted or of the impenetrable dissembler, and then again in the character of a man of coarse manners, utterly incapable of the arts of flattery and dissimulation. It has been doubted whether these different qualities could be compatible. Could a man to whom hypocrisy was so natural, go so far in barbarousness and coarseness of morals, as to reach such a pitch of habitual bloodthirstiness? Or, if this cruelty was his more true nature, could such a furious man be precisely master of the most consummate art of dissimulation? Or, were it conceivable that the man who resolved so self-consciously and considerately, in calm calculation, to tread the path of the villain, should spread fear and terror around him only with subtle intention, and accomplish his bloody deeds, as the chronicle insinuates, without any real natural propensity and alone from policy? The poet, like his historical source, has taken Richard's proud aspiring ambition, innate to his superiority of mind, as the spring of his actions, and hypocrisy as the principal means and instrument of his schemes. Discovering this means in his nature, Richard first matures in that soliloquy in Henry VI.,

(III. Act 3, sc. 2.) the far-reaching designs of his ambition. The poet has placed this quality as the central point of this character; the relation and the position into which he brought it with regard to the rest of the nature of this wonderful monster, as he found it dictated by intimations in the chronicle, is one of those psychological master-touches, with which this man has so often set up Columbus' egg.

The form of character, which we commonly think qualified for hypocrisy, is that of sneaking and cunning weakness, such as Elizabeth appears in our piece, such as Stanley too, who is called a fox in the chronicle. But this form of character would never have obtained a great tragic interest. If in the exercise of this art of dissimulation, there could not be placed a power which elevated it to merit, even if equivocal, it were impossible to gain sympathy for the hypocritical hero. Shakespeare adhered, therefore, in this, closely to the characteristics of history and to his own historical source. His Richard is a warrior of unequivocal valour. He has that in his nature which seems exactly most at variance with all hypocrisy. He is innately impetuous and has a passionate irritable disposition, he has inherited from his mother the nervous sensitiveness of not being able to hear censure, he was tetchy and wayward in his infancy, in his schooldays he was frightful, desperate, wild, and furious, in his prime of manhood, daring, bold, and venturous; it is with him a necessity to give free vent to his malicious tongue; in the midst of the hypocrisy and flattery of love, his scorn breaks out; and even when he is thoroughly playing the hypocrite, he likes it to bring himself into such a position, as to place no constraint upon his humour. His unjust hatred and secret snares against the relatives of the

queen, he hides under the mask of open and just anger at the hatred professed by *them*. In this brusque nature which sets a bold face against objections, difficulties, and dangers, there lies, as we see, even an aversion to cringe and to stoop, and only in his strivings after the position, in which each is to stoop before him, does he consent to the sacrifice of employing every convenient semblance. He has thus in the course of his life only in sober age matured the hypocrisy of his character, appearing at once proud and cunning, crafty and bloody, more bland but more destructive. In consequence of a resolve and scheme he has attained to this, not only to become a villain, but to conceal his villany and its ends as much as possible. For a character thus designed, victory over self, and unusual power of mind and soul are required, to form those talents of dissimulation, however innately they may exist, to that degree that they may govern the inherent ferocity. And therefore it is that at the issue of his lot, when misfortune overtakes him, when his inner strength gives way, when the elastic power of his self-command yields, the mantle of hypocrisy falls suddenly from his shoulder; then his old and former nature returns, the violent obstinacy of his disposition emerges anew, he loses his head, which he had so much under his control during the long career of his ambitious strivings, the torment of his soul betrays itself at every moment, as in thought and purpose he alternates, leaves his cause, and embarrasses himself. But before, so long as he is master of himself, he carries the art of dissimulation to such a height, that by an art in wooing, which reminds us of Romeo's in its fervour, by flattery, and by the magic power of language, he gains over the beautiful widow,

whose relatives and husband he had killed, that he bears the spittings of the wooed, that he, already sure of his success, offers her his sword to stab him; he carries hypocrisy to such a height, that he appears as the persecuted and threatened, while he is undermining and destroying everything; he plays the awkward blusterer where his hatred steals most covertly and most maliciously, he makes his brutal manners to be feared where his most refined intrigues are still more so; so that the actor has carefully to discern, when his violence is an outburst of nature and when it is a part assumed. He carries the art of dissimulation to such a height, that he, the terror of men, surrounded with religious works and exercises, can be called gentle and tender, too childishly foolish for the world, that he, in body and soul a devil, can appear like an angel of light, and that an enemy like Rivers believes in his devotion, an honest man like Hastings in his perfect inability for concealment, an Anne in his repentance for his bloody pursuit of war; the falling Clarence in his brotherly love. On the final step to the throne, he vies with Buckingham in hypocrisy, acting those clumsy scenes, which were to appear as compelling him to accept the crown from world-despising pious considerations; at the extreme point, in his impatience, he lets fall the mask of delicacy, with which he had hitherto concealed the hypocritical part he was acting. As soon as he is at the goal, he approaches Buckingham with barefaced demand for murder, and enquires of the first page for a hireling's dagger, he finds it no longer necessary to carry on secrecy, he forces himself not in the least to conceal his ill-humour and displeasure from Buckingham. Only when danger threatens

him from Richmond's preparations, when he tries to prevent his union with the daughter of the widowed queen by his own union with her, then in breaking with the crafty Elizabeth, compelled to it, he has once more recourse to those same magic arts, with the same masterly power as before in his wooing of Anne, and with the same success. But immediately after, when the curses of Margaret are fulfilled upon him, and his safety, his self-confidence, his power over himself is taken away, his art perishes with his fortune.

The threads are weak, which ally Richard's character to the good side of human nature; had he not found such a being in authenticated books of history, Shakespeare would perhaps not have ventured to depict either this, or subsequently Edmund and Iago. The poet has endeavoured to obtain an interest for him by making still stronger the threads which link him to the bad. The strength of his will is not alone turned against others, but against his own nature also, and this self-command challenges human admiration at all times. Even that benumbing of the conscience rests not on innate hardening and obduracy, but on a victory over its most serious emotions. The poet has here placed, in the most subtle passage, the one thread, which however links this monster with the bright side of human nature. Unbelieving as he appears, this hero of wickedness is notwithstanding not free from superstition; in this is betrayed the not wholly vanquished conscience, the slight trace of the germ of good in him. When Margaret (Act I. sc. 3.) pours out her curses upon him, he interrupts her before the decisive word, and endeavours to lead her curse back upon herself. He freely denies

the operation of curses, but only because in truth he fears their effect. The greatness of Richmond, prophesied already by Henry VI., is a remembrance which strikes him with paralyzing power when he hears of his undertakings. A fortune-teller has prophesied his death soon after he had seen Richmond, this he recalls anxiously to mind (the trait is borrowed from the chronicle), when he hears the name of Rougemont. When he thinks on the death of the innocent princes, he remembers the popular saying, "so wise so young, do ne'er live long", as if he sought a consolation in this, sheltering himself behind such a decree of fate; even with the women whom he deludes, he endeavours to trace back his misdeeds to inevitable destiny. This gentle voice, which consciousness and will repress in him by day, makes its way through all hindrances by night, when his intellectual powers are at rest; he is ever harassed by frightful dreams, and before the day of the battle with Richmond, there rise (and this too in accordance with the historical legend) the tormenting spirits of those murdered by him, and afflict him with despondency; the repressed conscience avenges itself by night and in that decisive night overwhelms him. He who in his realistic free-mindedness would fain have denied all higher powers, and by his hypocrisy deceived even heaven itself, he at last yields to their manifest might. The fearful warnings cause cold drops to stand on his brow, he is betrayed by the short questions of anguish, which he utters with difficulty, he sinks in the last effort to flatter himself, to feign self-love, in the last attempt of his exhausted power to master the inner voice; the thousand tongues of conscience prevail over the thousand tongues of self-concealment. But thus far his vigour still extends,

that he yet struggles in the desperate combat with the powers within, that "a thousand hearts are great within his bosom", when with shattered energies he rouses himself to do wonders in the fight, and, as the chronicle intimates, perishes in his defiance. He fell, says the author of the *Ghost of Richard*, "when greatness would be greater than itself", and this overweening power of the will fashions the fearful man into that genuinely tragic being, who compels our sympathy, in spite of the depravity which repels us from him.

No greater task has ever been presented to the actor. The charm and the greatness of this task does not lie, as Steevens says, in that the actor has by turns to exhibit the hero, the lover, the statesman, the buffoon, the hypocrite, the hardened and the repentant sinner; nor in this that he has to alternate between the extremest passion and the most familiar tone of conversation, between the expression of confidence now in the power of the warrior, now in the cunning of the diplomatist, now in the rhetoric of the flattering lover, and to produce in the richest material sharp transitions and the finest shading, every pantomimic and rhetorical art, but it lies in this, that out of all these tones he is to find the leading fundamental note, which unites them all. The poet has taken the characteristics from the chronicle, but in the chief point he has made a thorough alteration. The chronicle seems to give hypocrisy to Richard as his nature, and to exhibit cruelty in him rather as a cold work of policy; but the poet has made the inclination to brutality innate in him, and hypocrisy on the contrary a chosen means for his ambition. The decisive soliloquies in *Henry VI.*, and that at the com-

mencement of our play, make this indubitable. The poet has perhaps intentionally brought the whole character into a contrast of rare interest to the lover of art, with that of Henry V. In his early years Prince Henry leads a wild dissolute life without reflection, from the mere impulse of nature, in a manner involuntary, not displacing his nobler nature, but concealing and veiling it, following his social propensity for low pleasures, resolving at the same time in clear consciousness to lay aside this character at a future period in his kingly position. Richard on the other hand, whose rude nature events have first led to the path, where in combat and fight, working for his family rather than for himself, he might have become an estimable, if not an amiable man, Richard deliberates, at the first interruption of this life of outward action, upon a laying aside of his military bias, and upon a wide scheme of diplomacy and intrigue, which is to bring him to the throne. The most remarkable and opposite parts are presented to the actor in the two characters: in Henry, which will be played with all imaginable distance from anything of comedy, as a type of plain human nature, and in this Richard, who is a Proteus in the arts of metamorphosis, who calls himself Roscius, and with the arts of an actor, obtains the crown.

Once this character is established and its central point perceived, the central point and the idea of the piece is also apprehended; for Richard fills this centre entirely. This exclusively prominent position of Richard and his highly tragic nature, has given to this history the character rather of a pure tragedy; just as in Shakespeare's freest tragedies, all the persons of the piece are arranged with an inner relation to the principal figure and to the principal idea of

the piece, whilst usually the peculiarity of historical plays was, that the events and facts were distributed among more extensive groups of acting characters, who stand not throughout in that close connection, exhibited by the characters of pieces designed at will and fettered by no historical material. As soon as we consider the remaining characters of the piece, in and out of relation to Richard, we shall easily perceive the chain of ideas which links them together.

To the over-strained masculine strength of Richard we find the women first opposed in all their feminine weakness. Anne, whom he woos at the beginning of the piece, can, in her frail womanliness, which is without all moral support, excite less contempt than pity. She hates and marries; she curses her who shall be the wife of the man who killed her first husband, and she subjects herself to this curse; then as a wife, she is leagued with his enemies against him. Thus, says the poet of the Ghost of Richard,

"Women's griefs, nor loves, are dyed in grain,
For either's colour, time or men can stain".

Not often has a task like that of the poet's here, been ventured upon, when he produces a scene full of improbability, in which the principal part is played by this Anne, whose character is prepared or delineated in no other scene, where in the most unnatural situation, vanity, self-complacency, and weakness must be displayed in a moment; the part of the matron of Ephesus in a tragedy, which is however neither incredible nor forced. We must at the same time bear in view, that the murder of her relatives admits of excuse as among the unavoidable evils of war and defence. We must take into account the extraordinary degree of dissimulation,

which deceives even experienced men; and for this reason the artist who is to play Richard, must woo indeed more as an actor than as a lover, but must still go to the very limits of deception even for the initiated spectator. We have further to consider how the part of repentance and atonement becomes a valiant soldier, and how pardonable is the womanly weakness which delights in the idea of endeavouring to support and save such a penitent; we must remember that the unwonted mildness of the tyrant is three times more effective than the gentleness of the weak; and in the historical examples of our own day, we have seen how tender feminine characters have been united to the most brutal, in the consciousness of at least restraining the human barbarity at home. How little the poet scrupled at this scene, he seemed to desire to prove, by again repeating it towards the end of the piece in Richard's suit with the mother, — his sworn enemy, — for her own daughter. Once more does Richard assert that he committed his misdeeds alone out of love for the wooed one, once more he plays the penitent and points to better times, once more he allures the mother by the prospect of the throne for her daughter, he obtains her by the false show of the good that she will procure to the country by her assent; and fear, so says the chronicle, fear of the man whom no one can refuse with impunity, co-operates in part. This last indeed places Elizabeth in a more favourable light than Anne, as he wooed the latter at a period when he was not yet the all-powerful one that he now is. But there is another more important point, why this second scene cannot appear as a mere copy of the first. Elizabeth promises her daughter at the same time to the Pretender Richmond, the descendant

of Lancaster, who subsequently by this union reconciles and joins the red and white Roses. Elizabeth thus deceives the deceiver of all, and in the chance of the unsuccessful issue of Richmond's undertaking, she has perhaps saved the throne for her daughter. Thus far certainly the womanly weakness of her personal and maternal ambition extends, but thus far also the gift of the deepest dissimulation, which so often belongs by nature to the woman, and is even coupled with a kind of innocence. This contrast of Elizabeth to Richard is laid hold of in the happiest manner. She is weak and too much influenced by her relatives to animosity and family-antipathy, but she is also good, and in the extreme of grief she is gentle and not capable of cursing, when she would fain learn it from Margaret. With this goodness and weakness she deceives the strong and cunning man who has destroyed her house, for she is prudent and far-sighted, she is the mother of her son York of such kindred mind, she sees through Gloster from the first, she anticipates at once in River's fall the ruin of her whole family, she conceives then the plan, and this is taken from history, of reconciling in Richmond the houses of York and Lancaster, and she is the soul of the whole conspiracy which determines Richard's fall.

The counterpart of her weakness is the king; he is the contrast to her acuteness. He and his brother Clarence form a contrast of harmless security compared to the malicious brother, who strikes them both together and by means of each other. So are also the relatives of the queen trusty and harmless; a greedy, newly created nobility, haughty, scornful, humble alone towards the rough Gloster, into whose open snares they fall. Still more sharply is the

contrast with harmlessness marked out in Hastings. He is open-hearted, true, talkative, sincere, unsuspecting in his happiness, of loose morals, but a stranger to all mistrust. He trusts in Catesby as in Richard, he suffers neither warnings nor dreams to disturb him, he triumphs with imprudent joy over the fall of his enemies, when the same lot is threatening him; in confidence in Richard's friendship he will give his voice for him in the council when Richard has already devoted him to death, because with the same unvaried candour and with a nature incapable of dissimulation, he had declared that the crown would be foully misplaced on Richard's head. The whole scene (Act III. sc. 4.) in which this takes place, is borrowed from the chronicle even in the characteristic peculiarities of the language used. The relation in which Shakespeare has placed Brackenbury is, on the contrary, his own property; historically he plays quite another part to that in the tragedy. In a passive manner, as Catesby and Tyrrel in an active, he furthers the plans and deeds of Richard, which without these ready tools had never had the same easy course. These are the hired hypocrites who at every sign accept the part required, turn round at every wind, who like Brackenbury, ask not themselves nor honourably consider, what is the feeling of their heart, who will be "guiltless of the meaning", and unscrupulously and obtusely let happen what will. A more cunning tool of Gloster's is Buckingham. He is entirely placed by his side as a faint imitation of his ambition and of his art of hypocrisy. He has smaller objects in his desire for aggrandizement, as Richard has his larger, and for the furtherance of these he will use Richard as a tool, as Richard would use him. Gloster helps him to remove those who stand in

his way, the relatives of the queen, and Buckingham affects reconciliation with them, under cover of which he works their death. In return for this he then helps Gloster to make his way to the throne, and that with the same arts. He fancies himself a genuine actor, who has at his service ghastly looks and enforced smiles, he helps to influence the citizens, he takes part in the farces at Baynard's castle. He appears only by degrees drawn into Gloster's snares; Margaret even regards him at first as innocent; her curses touch him not; he believes not in curses, as Gloster also affects to do, but he must learn it; throughout, coming short of Richard, in bad as in good, he shudders at the murder which the other demands from him; when he is out of humour at the withholding of the reward which Richard had promised him for his assistance, he can no longer dissemble, whilst Gloster, just in the moment of his ill-humour against Hastings, appears particularly pleased and cheerful. In contrast to him again stands Stanley, as the true sneaking hypocrite, who conquers Richard with his own weapons, as Elizabeth does in her feminine manner. Related to Richmond, he has, from the first, cause to act cautiously; from a foe to the queen Elizabeth he has become a friend for the common object; he has his eye everywhere; he warns Hastings, although in vain; he carries on a lasting connection with Richmond, which in the most simple manner, he maintains through a priest. History itself considers it incomprehensible, that Richard, blinded as by God, did not arrest the suspicious man; Shakespeare endeavours excellently to explain it, by giving Stanley exactly the same arts as those which Gloster possesses. As the latter sought to conceal his secret intrigues from the Greys by open

displeasure, so Stanley throughout boldly declares himself a most watchful observer of Richmond's plan; he first brings Richard the intelligence of Dorset's flight to Richmond; he brings him the intelligence of Richmond's landing; he leaves his son as a hostage, and in this case of need stakes the life dearest to him, that he may play out his part of deceiving, costing Richard his kingdom and life and bringing a crown to Richmond. This latter is the only pure character, predicting better times. To do honour to the founder of the house of Tudor, the grandfather of queen Elizabeth, the poet has thought it necessary to do but little, after that he has blackened his enemy Richard as much as possible. The pious general of God had been like the princes, the sons of Edward, early removed from this dreadful society of the court; the blessing of Henry VI. rested on him. The princes on the contrary fall a sacrifice to the fearful age. Upon this we shall remark further in king John. The delineation of the two boys is a master-piece of the poet's, which would have been impossible to such men as Greene and Marlowe. With what scanty means is a disposition developed in the Prince of Wales, which promises a perfect manhood! In his words on his father's death and title, how much tender feeling and modesty! In the censuring question to his brother ("a beggar"?) what a delicate reminder of propriety! In his reply to Gloster: "I fear no uncles dead, an if they live, I hope, I need not fear", what caution, and at the same time what acuteness of mind in the equivocal words! And in what beautiful contrast to this, stands again the quick wit of the bold, precocious, pert, and clever York, which he so delicately weakens by a kindly blunting of its sting! In both we should think, the

opposite qualities of hypocrisy and regardless candour are moderated into qualities natural and human, in Edward into delicate respect and caution, in York into impulsive expression, hardly restraining a saucy thought, but yet forbearingly knowing how to temper it, so that even these two characters were placed in a fine relation to the main idea of the piece.

When we have considered all these counterparts and opposites to Richard, it may appear as if all together they were not powerful enough to form a corresponding counterbalance to the overwhelming nature of the hero. The poet has also indeed sought a still more forcible contrast, that he may point out an eye over the malicious course of the raging boar, capable of watching him, and a power, capable of crossing him; to his advancing success, he has opposed a fallen fortune, to his deep hypocrisy, a regardlessness, which every moment tears asunder the veil, to his bloodthirstiness, a carelessness, which mocks at death. It is the form of that Margaret, the widow of king Henry VI., who once came over to England as a beggar, who planted there the seeds of evil, who turned upon her own head every calamity and the hatred of all, who is now outlawed, and who at the close goes back again to France as a beggar. Before she accomplishes this (and this is quite a poetic arrangement of our piece) the hated one tarries in the midst of the hated society, that she may witness in everything the end of the fearful tragedy, when she herself had already withdrawn from the scene. Poor, insensible to ambition, she scorns the danger and death, which her remaining induces; she presses into the circle of her enemies, and wholly incapable of commanding herself,

utterly unwilling to conceal herself or her feelings, with impotent passion, with incautious openness, with prophetic rage, she casts forth the most unsparing reproaches, the most regardless truths, and the most fearful curses, — like the loud trumpet of God's judgment, — upon the degraded humanity around her. And these words have more weight and power, than all the bloody deeds of Richard and his cunning intrigues, and her hunger for revenge is more appeased than Richard's thirst for greatness. The old York (in Henry VI.) had once cursed her, when she committed the womanly outrage of giving him a napkin bathed in the blood of his son Rutland; his curse was fulfilled on her, when she lost throne, husband, and the son, whom Richard stabbed, and at whose fall Rivers, Grey, Hastings, and Vaughan were present as accessories. But on this day the power of York's curse was transferred to her, and her vengeance-loving soul panted with desire to requite it upon all her enemies. The manifold misery which she lives to see befall her enemies, sweetens her own misery, and she would fain slip her weary head out of the yoke of her sorrow, to leave the burden of it upon the hated Elizabeth. We have said, before, (in Henry VI.) that the chronicle also remarks at the death of Margaret's son, that all those present drank subsequently of the same cup "in consequence of the merited justice and the due punishment of God". This judgment is embodied in the fearful Margaret and her curses, in which the avenging spirit utters its terrible oracle. With striking glaringness, distinctness, and intensity, Shakespeare has pronounced, repeated, and accomplished these imprecations. Margaret has hurled the curse over all those accomplices in the murder of her son, and in all it comes

to maturity; it is fulfilled in the dying Edward; it is fulfilled in Clarence, who perjured himself, when he had promised to fight for Lancaster; it is fulfilled in Hastings, who had sworn false reconciliation in presence of the dying Edward; it is fulfilled in Elizabeth, who, only the vain semblance of herself, was left without brother, without husband, and almost without children; upon Buckingham her mere warning, directed by her to one still guiltless, falls like a curse, when he becomes guilty. It is not enough, that Margaret pronounces these curses upon all; the most of them, Buckingham, Hastings, Anne, call down the imprecation by sinful promises upon themselves, and when it is fulfilled, the poet recalls once more to mind the exact prediction. Finally upon Richard himself these revengeful curses are heaped, and they are realized most decidedly. And he too in the moment of his unbridled scorn (Act IV. sc. 4.) calls down the curse upon himself. Nay, more than this: his own mother, the duchess of York, who, placed between Elizabeth and Margaret, by turns, according to time and cause, possesses the violent flashes of the one and the mild composure of the other, she, Richard's own mother; says to him (Act IV. sc. 4.), that her prayers would fight for the adverse party; and she desires that her curse on the day of battle may tire him more than all the complete armour that he wears. Wonderful use is made of this curse in the scene before the battle of Bosworth, a use worth more than all the others, in which the poet has employed these imprecations. Without looking back to that maternal sentence, without Richard himself remembering it, his "beaver" burdens him in the battle so that he orders it to be made easier, and his arm is weary with the lance, which he exchanges for lighter. This is

better than the multiplied impression of the severe curses, and their literal and ever-repeated fulfilment; and better too is the imprecation of the mother temporarily irritated, when the occasion demanded it, than the steady excess of the revengeful curses of Margaret. But the excess and the repetition alone are to be blamed, not the thing itself. We must be on our guard of appearing on the side of those interpreters, who consider the introduction of Margaret altogether and her reproaches at court absurd, as well as Richard's wooing in the street. But it is a wise contrast, which necessitates the part assigned to Margaret, and even the glaring prominence given to her curses and their fulfilment has its wise intention. The more secretly the sins of this brood of hypocrites were practised, the more visibly and notoriously should punishment overtake them; the manifest retribution of God should appear all the more evident against the secrecy and the deceit of men; and the interference of eternal justice ought plainly and tangibly to appear against the evil-doers, who think to ensnare heaven itself, who believe not in an avenging power, nor in the curse, which rests on evil deeds themselves. On the way to death says Buckingham:

"That high All-Seer which I dallied with,
Hath turned my feigned prayer on my head,
And given in earnest what I begg'd in jest".

And just so also his own curse discharges itself on Richard's head, a curse which wantonly he conjured upon himself.

RICHARD II.

The date of Richard II. has been already pointed out; we conjectured that it was written soon after Richard III. Passionate high-strained passages, one even (Act V. sc. 3.), which treats a tragic subject almost humorously, are written in rhyming couplets; alternate rhymes and alliteration also occur. In its profound design and in its characters, as well as in the treatment of it in conformity with the historical story, the piece, compared with Richard III., shows certain progress; setting aside stage-effect, Coleridge justly calls it the first and most admirable of Shakespeare's purely historical pieces, in which the history forms the story and not, as in Henry IV., merely leads it. The historical events, which Richard comprises, extend from September, 1398, to February, 1400. Everything essential in the events is strictly taken from Holinshed's chronicle; where Shakespeare allows himself liberty, is in those externals, which he never regarded when he could make them serve poetic objects.

Shakespeare had in this piece also a previous dramatic work, which, however, is unknown to us. We know only from the statement of a Dr. Forman, that in 1611, a play of Richard II. was performed on Shakespeare's stage, which

from the indication of its contents must have handled the earlier years of Richard's reign, and must have been more rich in facts and more bloody than Shakespeare's work. An interesting historical incident is connected with this piece. When the Earl of Essex in 1601 wished to excite the London citizens to an insurrection, that he might remove his enemies from the person of the queen, he ordered his confidential friends, Sir Gilly Merrick and others, to act the tragedy of Richard II., before the outbreak of the conspiracy, in public streets and houses, to inflame the minds of the people, and Elizabeth heard of this performance and took the lead in the conversation upon it, calling herself Richard II. There is no doubt, that this play, employed in the design of the conspirators, was this older Richard II. For Shakespeare's drama is certainly a revolutionary picture, but of so mild a character, and it demands such hearty sympathy for the dethroned king, and most especially in the very scene of the deposition, that it would appear unfavourable for such an object; besides in the editions before 1601, the whole scene of the deposition of Richard, in the fourth act, although it must have been written by the poet at the outset, was not even printed, and certainly also not acted under Elizabeth's reign. Nothing, however, is more natural, than that from the extraordinarily practical character of these historical pieces, such a use, even of Shakespeare's, should be thought of. In the former century, Shakespeare's Richard II. was performed at the time that the mercantile class in England pressed for a war with Spain, and Robert Walpole opposed this popular policy; all the passages, which concerned the restraint of the king among his flatterers, were referred to Walpole and

received with loud vociferations, others upon the bankruptcy of the broken-hearted king were heard with death-like and reverential silence.

Richard II. must be read in a series with Henry IV. and V., in order thoroughly to understand it. The finest touches for the explanation of characters and actions in the first piece of the series, are placed in passages of the third and fourth, we might almost say intentionally concealed there. The principal character of the fourth piece, Henry V., is already mentioned in the first, in Richard, and his wild youth is pointed out at a period, when he was only twelve years old. The character of the Duke of Aumerle, who plays no brilliant part in Richard, after his mother has saved him from the punishment of high-treason, and has prayed to God to make her old son new, is again silently brought forward by the poet in Henry V., a new man indeed, who has become great with the heroic age and dies the death of a hero at Agincourt. Thus the most delicate threads entwine around the four pieces, to unite them together; other allusions equally delicate, place this Lancastrian tetralogy in an opposite relation to that of York. The similarity of the historical events in the rise and fall of the two houses did not escape the poet; had he handled the history of the House of York, later in point of time, *after* instead of *before* the history of that of Lancaster, this would have allowed him to mark these similarities and relations even more sharply in both subjects. Richard II. appears in this tetralogy, as Henry VI. did in the York. A young prince, not without fine human talents, surrounded by uncles and arrogant protectors, by favourites and protégés, in both cases brings the kingdom to ruin; both lose

their hereditary throne by usurpers, and die by violence in prison. Bolingbroke undermines Richard's throne in a similar manner to that in which York attacks Henry VI.'s; the one falls perjured before he has obtained the last object of his ambitious path; the other reaches this goal through fortune and merit, and maintains it by estimable administration and repentant compensation. But retribution threatens the one usurping house as well as the other; domestic discord reigns in the family of Henry IV., as among the sons of York under Edward IV. From this moment, however, the destinies of the two houses are sundered by a rigorous contrast, which we have pointed out before; from the ill-starred family circumstances under the Lancastrians, rose Henry V., who in the midst of wild youthful excesses took the great resolution to restore to the English throne the splendour of the Edwards, whilst from the York house, Richard III. in the midst of a career of warlike fame, forms the project of clearing for himself a way to the throne by a chain of base actions. A great ruler in the one makes us forget by his virtues for a brief glorious period the misdeeds of the Lancastrians, in the other a bloody tyrant brings by his wickedness the extremest dishonour upon the house of York and hurries it to ruin. As in these outer circumstances a certain parallel between the two histories is not to be mistaken, we have also already many times mentioned the similar idea from which Shakespeare treated the two tetralogies. The strife for an unsettled crown between merit and right, might surely in Henry VI. be called the leading, at least the prominent thought; in Richard III., it is replaced by a more ethical idea, which in this piece somewhat interferes with its purely historical character; here in Richard II.,

on the contrary, this thought in all political purity is drawn from the historical matter, and is embraced by the poet with perfect independence, that with it he may form the historical material into a freer work of art, of a higher and more complete character, than the history in itself affords.

Richard II. was the son of the Black Prince, Edward III.'s brave eldest son. According to historical tradition, he was most beautiful, and Shakespeare also in contrasting him with Richard III., who is urged by his deformity to avenge himself on nature, has not without intention invested him with the beautiful form, which, according to Bacon, renders "him generally lightminded, whom it adorns and whom it moves"; he calls him in the lips of Percy "a sweet lovely rose". He gives him the outward features of his father, and allows us occasionally to perceive a mental likeness also; the mild nature of the lamb and the violence of the lion, which the poet speaks of as combined in the Black Prince, are both exhibited in him. The first is scarcely to be mistaken; it becomes visible even at the last moment in the many tokens of attachment, which he receives at a time when it is dangerous to manifest it, and after his death in the longing for him, which is aroused in the adversaries, who had conspired against him. The other quality is more hidden in single scattered traits. He appears throughout like a "young hot colt", easily provoked, like a violent flame consuming itself quickly; he compares himself to the brilliant Phaeton, who, incapable and daring, would manage his refractory steeds; in the moment of misfortune the defiance of an innate nobility is aroused in the midst of his sorrow, and in his death he appears as "full of valour as of royal blood". But this fine disposition is wholly obliterated;

in the early season of his life and rule he has lost his reputation; he is surrounded by a troop of creatures and favourites, parasites and men who preyed on the kingdom, who stop his ear with flatteries, and poison it with wanton imaginations, who make him tyrannical and imperious, incapable of hearing a word of blame and admonition, even from the lips of his dying uncle; men who made him shallow with Italian fashions, surrounded him with every low vanity, and enticed him into ostentation and extravagance. In Henry IV., his life and actions are described in a passage of greater length; than our own piece affords. "The skipping king," it says,

"ambled up and down
 With shallow jesters, and rash bavin wits,
 Soon kindled and soon burn'd: carded his state;
 Mingled his royalty with capering fools;
 Had his great name profaned with their scorns:
 And gavè his countenance, against his name,
 To laugh at gibing boys, and stand the push
 Of every beardless vain comparative:
 Grew a companion to the common streets,
 Enfeoff'd himself to popularity:
 That being daily swallowed by men's eyes,
 They surfeited with honey; and began
 To loathe the taste of sweetness, whereof a little
 More than a little is by much too much".

Of scenes of this kind Shakespeare has shewn us little or nothing in Richard II.: only from a distance can we perceive the intimate tone of the intercourse, on which Aumerle and Bushy stood with king and queen. The poet has left this merry frivolous society in the back-ground, which perhaps, considering the play of Richard II. by itself, would be a defect; but he had matter too similar to depict in Henry IV., and he was obliged to avoid repetition; he gave

the jovial picture to the cheerful play, and left it out of the tragic piece. In its stead, most wisely, that he might not make the tragedy of the national history laughable, he placed the serious and tragic side of this behaviour. Incited by those around him, Richard had caused his faithful, well-meaning uncle Gloster, who, according to historical tradition, had assumed the protectorship of the young king, to be murdered, and this made his remaining uncles, Lancaster and York, apprehensive for their safety, although, as the chronicle says, they concealed the sting of their discontent. Impoverished by his companions, Richard sees his coffers empty, he has recourse to forced loans, to extortion of taxes and fines, and at last lets the English kingdom as a tenure to his parasites, no longer a king, only a landlord of England. A traitor to this unsubdued land, he has by his contracts, resigned the conquests of his father. At length he lays hands on private property, and seizes the possessions of the late old Lancaster and of his banished son, thus depriving himself of the hearts of the people and of the nobles. The ruin of the impoverished land, the subversion of right, the danger of property, a revolt in Ireland, the arming of the nobles in self-defence, all these indications allow us to observe in the two first acts the growing seed of revolution, which the misled king had scattered. The prognostication of the fall of Richard II., is read by the voice of the people in the common signs of all revolutionary periods (Act II. sc. 4.):

“Rich men look sad, and ruffians dance and leap, —
 The one, in fear to lose what they enjoy,
 The other, to enjoy by rage and war”.

Besides the scattered touches and the insinuations,

which denote the inability of the king and his wavering between unseasonable power and weakness, the poet has chosen only one event for a closer dramatic prominence, to which the catastrophe of Richard's fate is united: — the knightly quarrel between Bolingbroke and Norfolk, with which the piece begins. Coleridge said of this scene, that it appears introduced, in order beforehand to depict the characters of Richard and Bolingbroke; and Courtenay was even bold enough to think, it was just introduced, because Shakespeare found it in the chronicle. But this was not the method of Shakespeare's writing. Later in Henry IV. (II. Act IV. sc. 1.) he has abundantly said in the plainest language, that he began with this scene, because it was just the beginning of all the sufferings, which fell upon king Richard and afterwards upon his dethroners. Norfolk's son there says:

"O, when the king did throw his warder down,
His *own* life hung upon the staff he threw;
Then threw he down himself; and all their lives,
That by indictment, or by dint of sword,
Have since miscarried under Bolingbroke".

The scene then, however necessary in itself, certainly serves essentially to place in opposition to each other, in their first decisive collision, the two main characters, Richard and Bolingbroke, the declining king yet in his power and glory, and the rising one in his misfortune and banishment. In his accusation of Norfolk, Bolingbroke besets the king remotely with hostile designs. The guilt of Gloster's death rests in the public opinion upon the king and his associates; subsequently Aumerle emerges as the immediate instrument; the guilt of having known it and

concealed it falls upon Norfolk alone, a guilt of which he accuses himself; but the popular hatred turns upon him as upon the king. Bolingbroke, as we learn expressly in the second part of Henry IV. (Act IV. sc. 1.), uses this circumstance to nourish the hatred and to draw upon himself the favour of the people, whilst he exhibits the Lancastrians honourably solicitous about a sacred family-matter. He knows that Norfolk is not guilty of the death of Gloster, but just as brave as he is politic, he freely ventures to propose the judgment of God, for he removes in him the single powerful support of the king, and at the same time the enemy of his own family. The survivors of the murdered Gloster spur on the Lancastrians to revenge, their own security being concerned; the old Gaunt indeed commits vengeance to God, but his son Bolingbroke holds it for more certain, if it is in his own human hand. The venerable old man, whom Shakespeare invests with riper years than history does, has transmitted to his son the elements out of which his deeply concealed character is blended. The hoary hero has borne in his heart the welfare of his fatherland, and his patriotic feelings obtain so much in his dying hour over his fidelity as a subject, that in words of the greatest enthusiasm for his glorious country he cuttingly reproaches the sinful Richard with what he has done with this "demi-Paradise". Sorrow for the country and sorrow for his banished son hurried him to the grave. With his patriotic feeling is mingled, we see, family-feeling and self-love; both are also strong in the son. The son's far-stretching domestic policy accompanies and determines his whole life; his patriotic feeling breaks forth in the touching lament on his banishment, which justly has been called not only very beautiful, but very english. To

both these traits is joined that diplomatic cunning, which lies in the very recesses of his nature, and is, therefore, concealed without difficulty. This too the son appears to have inherited from his father; for a shrewd design cannot be more delicately coupled with generosity than in the old Gaunt, when in the council of state, he gives his vote for the banishment of his son, which subsequently breaks his heart, in the idea of moving the rest by his too severe sentence to a milder judgment. With just such a deeply concealed policy, Shakespeare has drawn the son, who in one touch alone, in *Richard II.*, appears without a mask, who in all others, throughout the three pieces, remains as a riddle even to the attentive reader, until at length the last hour of life elicits a confession to his son. In this same mysterious obscurity, even the commencement-scene between Bolingbroke and Norfolk is maintained. The designs and motives which actuate the former, we have just intimated, but we have gathered them from subsequent disclosures; in the moment of action it is not clear at what he aims, and Norfolk's bearing increases the obscurity. The voice of innocence and honour speaks in him, mostly in his voluntary confessions, and no less so in his strong appeal to his fidelity towards the king. It goes so far, that he raises not the veil from the misdeed of which he is accused, not even, after the king's sentence of a dateless banishment has fallen on him "all unlooked for", when he hoped for other reward than this disgrace. The king too condemns him, we likewise learn at the end of *Henry IV.* (II. Act IV. sc. 1.), against his will, because the general anger discharged itself on him, but the enthusiasm of popular favour was already directed to Bolingbroke, who at his departure

behaves to the multitude like a condescending prince. The weak Richard, who Norfolk predicts will rue this deed, ignobly banishes for a life-time the man whom he loves and who would have been his most faithful support, and for a few years the other whom he hates, whose ambitious thoughts he fears, and whose banishment he has in his heart faithlessly resolved as limitless. He disturbs the combat between the two, whose peace he fears still more: he strikes his enemy and provokes him, without making him harmless; the helplessness of a man of a troubled conscience, who knows not the right occasion for mildness or severity, is displayed in this one case. The chronicle sums up the faults of his government in these words: he showed too great kindness to his friends, too great favour to his enemies. Both are just. But in this case he shows in his severity towards his friend, that he is inconsistent moreover, and allows himself to be influenced by the power of opinion in an unessential point, when he neglected to attend to it in an essential.

Quite in the sense of the sentence quoted from the chronicle, Shakespeare draws the political moral from Richard's rule in the garden-scene (Act. III. sc. 4.), and its simple allegory. The wise gardener cares to give "supportance to the bending twigs, which like unruly children make their sire stoop with oppression of their prodigal weight"; he cuts off the heads of too fast growing sprays, that look too lofty on the commonwealth; he roots away the noisome weed. Richard, who had not observed the first of these rules in his jealousy of Gloster, who had neglected the second in his too great favour to Bolingbroke, and the third in his too great kindness to his parasites, Bagot and Bushy, now sees

the fall of the leaves; another roots away the weeds "that his broad-spreading leaves did shelter, that seemed in eating him to hold him up". Had he cherished and nurtured his kingdom as the gardeners their garden, he would have done to the great as they to their trees, wounding the bark at times to prevent its too luxuriant growth, he would have lopped away the superfluous branches and thus he might have tasted and enjoyed their fruits and retained his crown.

Instead of this he did everything which could forfeit his crown. We have seen the king's unadvised conduct in the quarrel between Bolingbroke and Norfolk. Hardly is this dispute settled, than the old Gaunt dies; the Irish revolt demands a remedy; the extravagant prince has no money; he now seizes the Lancastrian property, which kindles even the good-natured York, indolent and rest-loving as he is. Richard goes in person to Ireland, and leaves behind him the irritated York, the weakest whom he could choose, as governor of England. Instantly the banished Bolingbroke seizes the occasion to return to the kingdom thus vacated, under the pretext of taking possession of his lawful inheritance. The apprehensive nobles, the Percys, join themselves to him; the miserable friends of the king give up their cause at once as lost; the helpless York goes over. When Richard returns from Ireland, he possesses no more of the kingdom, than his right to it. He persuades himself, rather than that he is convinced of it, that with this right he has everything. He comes back from Ireland, conscience-stricken, foreboding, paralyzed and inactive. With wonted enthusiasm, when he again sets foot on English ground, he hopes that the "earth shall have a feeling, and the stones prove armed soldiers, ere her native

king shall falter under foul rebellious arms". He buries himself in poetical and religious consolation, and intrenches himself behind his divine right and authority: "not all the water in the rough rude sea can wash the balm from an anointed king"; the breath of worldly men cannot depose the deputy elected by the Lord. He builds upon this, that God and Heaven who guard the right, have for every man of Bolingbroke's, "in heavenly pay a glorious angel" for him. He compares his kingly dignity to the sun, in whose absence robbers range abroad, but before his fiery rise in the east they tremblingly escape. But soon the poet, glancing silently back upon this image, exhibits him in opposition to the robber Bolingbroke, and this latter himself compares him just so to the sun emerging from the east, Act III. sc. 3. (in many editions the passage is placed in the lips of York); but the envious clouds dim the kingly aspect, block up his track, and are not so quickly dispersed as Richard imagined. Just while he boasts so warmly of the assistance of heaven, the tidings come, that not alone no angels stand in readiness for him, but that even men are deserting him. Then suddenly his confidence in his good right forsakes him. He calls upon his name and his majesty, but on a new message of misfortune his courage breaks down even to abdication. Once more later, he asserts to Northumberland his divine right, and that no human hand can seize his sacred sceptre without robbery and violence. But the blessing of heaven is now visibly on the side of power; he whom the people uphold, stands more surely than the anointed of God.

Shakespeare writes here an immortal lesson upon the royalty of God's grace and the law of inviolability. His

ground is here also that two-sided one of entire impartiality and candour, to which we unweariedly point, as to the greatest characteristic of his extraordinary mental superiority. He places his opinion chiefly in the mouth of the Bishop of Carlisle, the grand type of genuine loyalty, who stands faithfully by the side of the lawful king, without concealing from him the stern voice of truth; who defies the unlawful usurper in the public assembly, but still elicits even from the latter, true honour, favour, and esteem. Absorbed in his meditations upon show and reality, over which we see Shakespeare brooding throughout this period of his life, he cannot regard the halo of divine right as the reality of royalty. No inviolability can protect the anointed head, if it render itself unworthy of the divine possession; no legitimacy and no balm can absolve the ruler from his duties to the land of his care! Every vocation would appear to our poet of God, and with the vocation every duty. The fulfilment of duty is even the king's first condition of stability; by his neglect of it he forfeits possession and right, by this he loses himself, his inner dignity, his consecration, and his power. Thus Henry IV. says to his son in these plain words, that unbridled and self-forgetful as he then was, he was only "the shadow of succession"; the honourable Percy, though a rebel, deserved rather to be the heir. The dutiful illegality is compared with the duty-forgetting legitimacy, it is placed before it by the man who had once elevated himself by it, and who would now secure his legality by the fulfilment of duty. It is full of information upon Shakespeare's true intention, if we accurately compare this piece with his King John. The usurper John maintains the crown by good and bad

means, so long as he does not lose his power and confidence, so long as he abstains from wicked deeds and useless cruelty, and is thoroughly English-minded; as soon as he descends from his royal duty and sells England, he loses himself and his crown. He, the usurper, differs not from the lawful Richard, who in the same way let the 'land by lease, and giving up his duty, gave up himself also. It belongs essentially to this kingly duty, that the prince, if he will secure his own right, must defend and protect the right of others. The peculiar right of the king is not esteemed by Shakespeare more sacred than any other; these views have taken deeper root in England from the times of Shakespeare and the Dutch Republic, until Milton, in his *Defensio pro Populo*, enforced them with marked emphasis. As soon as Richard had touched the inheritance of Lancaster, he had placed in his hands as it were the right of retaliation. The indolent York thus speaks to him immediately :

"Take from time his rights ;
 Let not *to-morrow* then ensue to-day ;
 Be not thyself, for how art thou a king,
 But by fair sequence and succession".

He tells him that he "plucks a thousand dangers on his head", that he loses "a thousand well-disposed hearts"; and that he "pricks his tender patience to those thoughts, which honour and allegiance cannot think". To this kingly duty there belongs moreover, not alone the absence of all those vices of a weak love of pleasure, by which Richard is ruined, but in their place the virtue of energy, which is the first honour even of the common man. Heaven alone helps us, says Carlisle to Richard, when we embrace his means. And Salisbury enforces upon Richard the great

experience taken from the precipitation of revolutionary times: —

“One day too late, I fear, my noble lord,
Hath clouded all thy happy days on earth;
To-day, to-day, unhappy day, too late,
O'erthrows thy joys, friends, fortune, and thy state”.

Upon this warning he rises, when now even the rising is too late. Before, every claim from Aumerle and Carlisle upon his manliness, every reproach of his tardiness, was in vain, he was absorbed in himself, and revelled in his misfortune as before in his prosperity. And so at last his wife must shame him when she finds him also deposed in intellect: she would see him like a lion, dying, that with rage “thrusteth forth his paw, and wounds the earth”, but he, pupil-like, takes his correction mildly, and teaches resignation to his wife, whose lips this lesson would have better suited. The weakness and guilt, which cause revolutions unexpectedly to prosper, are depicted by the poet in a masterly manner; and in this piece he draws up before us in succession, the spectacle of the powers at work at such a period of revolution, a picture of a grandeur and depth scarcely to be fathomed. For no piece must be read so often as this, and in such close connection with the succeeding, that it may be thoroughly understood. Unadorned and without brilliancy of matter, it yet rewards patient industry all the more richly. To analyze the contents of the whole four pieces in a narrative, where the underlying motive should be seen entirely in Shakespeare's sense, would be a comprehensive work, and one of extraordinary fulness. Whoever has read them from the beginning of this Richard to the close of Henry V., with conscientious reflection upon every

single point, appears to himself truly to have passed through an entire world.

The poet who has not allowed us fully to know the young king in his prosperity, unfolds his character the more fascinatingly and minutely in his misfortune. As soon as with Bolingbroke's landing, the turning point in his fortune is arrived, just where we should have wished to see the powerful ruler, there stands conspicuously before us, the kindly human nature, which was before obscured in prosperity and mirth, but even now is accompanied by weakness and want of stability, the distinguishing feature of his character. He has always needed props, and strong props he has not endured; he had sought them in climbing plants, which have pulled himself to the ground; Gaunt and Norfolk he had alienated. For this reason, at the first moment of misfortune he falls past recovery. As soon as the first intelligence of the defection of his people arrives, he is pale and disheartened; at the second message, which only threatens him with a new evil, he is submissive and ready for abdication and death. When Aumerle reminds him of his father York, he rouses himself once more, but as soon as he hears that even this last prop is broken, he curses his cousin for having led him forth "of that sweet way he was in to despair"; he renounces every comfort, every act; he orders his troops to be discharged; capable of no further effort he will be reminded of none, and himself removes every temptation to it. A highly poetic brilliancy is cast upon the scenes of the humiliation and ruin of the romantic youth, whose fancy rises in sorrow and misfortune, to a height which allows us to infer the strength of the intoxication, with which he had before plunged into pleasure. The power

which at that time had carried him beyond himself, turns now with fearful force within, and the pleasure-loving man now finds enjoyment in suffering and sorrow, and a sweetness in despair. He calls himself at first the slave of a "kingly woe"; subsequently on the contrary, deprived of his throne, he will remain king of his griefs. The words and predictions of the basely injured Gaunt are now to be fulfilled upon the insulter of the dying man. That sentence finds its truth in Richard:

"Woe doth the heavier sit
Where it perceives it is but faintly borne".

True in him is the word;

"Light vanity, insatiate cormorant,
Consuming means, soon preys upon itself".

Richard marvelled in Gaunt's dying-scene (Act II. sc. 1.), how the lips of the sick can play with words, but in the deathly sickness of his *own* misery he learns how to fall still deeper into this play of words and speculative thought. At the very first, in the beginning of his sufferings he broods upon thoughts of graves and death; he wishes to let the fate of all fallen kings pass before his mind, and then (as if the words of the dying Gaunt were in his thoughts, when he said to him, that a thousand flatterers sit within the small compass of his crown, wasting the land), he pictures to himself the image of the crown in sad contrast to his present position, as if within its hollow temples the antick Death kept his court, allowing the wearer of the crown "a breath, a little scene to monarchize". When he afterwards appears before his enemies (Act III. sc. 3.) a paroxysm of his kingly fancy exhibits him to the sneaking Northumberland with a show of power; indeed this was now the moment for arresting

with dignity and courage the yet undefined plot. But before Bolingbroke had declared any part, at a time when even in the presence of the weak York, no one might omit the royal title before Richard's name without apology, suddenly and without any cause his wings hang wearied, he speaks himself of the subjection of the king; and as he sees Aumerle weep, his lively fancy at once runs away with him to the borders of insanity: his words remind us in these scenes of the passionate melancholy of Lear, which is the prelude to his madness. He asks whether they shall "play the wantons with their woes, and make some pretty match with shedding tears? as thus; — to drop them still upon one place, till they have fretted a pair of graves". Even here, it seems, we look back shudderingly from the midst of wretchedness and misery to that vain intercourse and waste of time, in which Richard formerly lived with his companions. The play on words and the conceits in these scenes have been censured as inappropriate, but nowhere are they placed with so deep and true a purpose; those whose whole intercourse consisted formerly in raillery and quibbling, speculate most naturally in such a position in an immoderate manner, and delight in exhausting an idea, brought about by the force of circumstances. Richard remembers that he is talking but idly, and remarks that they mock at him; the worst is that Northumberland has heard his foolish words, and designates him to Bolingbroke as a frantic man. That which the rebels would not have ventured, the childish man, whom the feeling of being forsaken has quite cast down, offers of himself to them; he himself designates first the danger which surrounds him, when in his half-insane words he calls Northumberland prince and Bolingbroke king; in

the ears of all, he gives himself and his inheritance into Bolingbroke's hands, even before any one had demanded it. In the scene also of the deposition, which accords excellently with the nature of the king and crowns the characteristic touches, we hear him rapt in the beautiful poetic images upon his misfortune, we see him burying himself in his sorrow with a kind of pleasure. He pictures to himself as in a drama, the scene, over which another would have passed quickly. Only when it shames him to read his own indictment, his proud nature breaks out yet once again, and he perceives too late how miserably he had become a traitor to himself. Later too, when we see Richard on the way to prison and in prison, even in his resignation, he is ever employed in picturing his painful condition to himself as still more painful, revelling, as it were, in his sorrow, and emptying the cup to the very dregs. He peoples the little space of his prison with his wild fancy, he studies how he may compare it to the world. An air of music drives him to reflect how he has here "the daintiness of ear to check time broke in a disordered string", whilst "for the concord of his state and time he had no ear to hear his true time broke". He wasted time, which now wastes him; and thus again in another melancholy simile he pictures himself as a clock, which time had made out of himself. It is wise of the poet, that out of the different stories of Richard's death, he chose that which exhibits him to us at the end in honourable strength, after he has allowed us also to perceive the attractive power of his amiability; it is therefore not without esteem that we take our leave of the commiserated man.

Richard himself awarded the crown to Bolingbroke when he said to him: "They well deserve to *have*, that

know the strongest and surest way to *get*." But by this can the usurper's attack on the throne in no wise be justified. A historical, a political, as well as a divine curse, rests upon the deed, which if not revenged upon the perpetrator himself, reacts upon his house. If God does not protect the sinful king, he protects not therefore the sinful deeds of his adversaries. Richard and Carlisle utter rather the prediction of punishment: God shall muster "armies of pestilence" which shall strike the children of rebels, yet unborn; for this assault by the unholy hand of the subject against the king, the land was to be called "the field of Golgotha and dead men's skulls", and "the woefullest division" would visit it. This curse was fulfilled first in those who had carried out Bolingbroke's schemes: "The love of wicked friends", Richard warns Northumberland,

"converts to fear;
That fear, to hate; and hate turns one or both
To worthy danger and deserved death".

So it was; Northumberland himself, like the characters in Richard III., draws down the fulfilment of the curse upon himself, with the words: "Thy guilt be on my head." The new king meets the vengeance of heaven subsequently in the rebellion of the Percys, his supporters, and in the civil war, which suffers him not to succeed in the longed-for expiation of his crime, a crusade to the Holy Land. Still closer does retribution meet him in his torment of heart, fearing the same fate from his own son which he had brought upon Richard, fearing for him the same that he had done to Richard, while as prince of Wales he leads the same unrestrained life. The good kingly use, which Henry makes of his usurped crown, reconciles

not heaven so much as that it checks its vengeance; as on the contrary in Richard, the bad use had destroyed the good right. He sanctifies the dignity attained, he confirms it as a more sure possession, he transmits it to his son who adorns it with new glory. But let one unworthy or even weak ruler come into the line, like Henry VI., quickly will that curse discharge itself upon him, and more fiercely than upon Richard, as the same reproaches must press more heavily upon the usurper, than upon the lawful ruler.

But in what does the poet exhibit that good use of the crown which we extol in Bolingbroke? The whole of Henry IV. must give an answer to this question; but even in Richard II., the reply is found. His whole path to the kingdom is a royal path, and scarcely has he reached it than he shows by the most striking contrast, the difference between the king by nature and the king by mere inheritance. Before, when banished by Richard, he left the country, he left it like a king. After the death of his father and the plunder of his house, he returns unhesitatingly back from banishment, in defiance of his sentence, and lands poor and helpless on the forbidden shore. The discontented Percys, in league with him before his landing, hasten to him; the steward of Worcester does so, not out of love for him, but for his outlawed brother. On the journey which Bolingbroke has to make with his friends, he flatters them with fair words and entertains them with sweet discourse, but not so as to sell himself to these helpers upon whom at the time he wholly depends, as Richard did to his favourites, who even wholly depended upon *him*. The possessionless man, who at the time has only thanks and promises for the future to give, is in earnest in his gratitude, without intending

subsequently when he is king to concede to the helpers to the throne a position above the throne. The arrogance with which Northumberland, "the ladder wherewithal the mounting Bolingbroke ascended the throne", is on a future day to appear against him, is fully foretold in that with which he prepared the way for him to the throne. He and his followers in their active eagerness, alertness, and officiousness, form a contrast to Richard's for the most part inactive faint-hearted flatterers: they are the willing myrmidons of the rebellion who urge Bolingbroke as quickly forward as the followers of Richard check his better nature. It is the now smooth and flexible, now rough and unfeeling Northumberland, who first speaks of Richard with the omission of his title; it is he who repeats more solemnly and forcibly the oath of Bolingbroke that "his coming is but for his own"; it is he who in the scene of deposition maliciously torments king Richard with the reading of his accusation; it is he who would arbitrarily arrest the noble Carlisle for high treason after the outbreak of his feelings of right and his civic fidelity. But how noble throughout does Bolingbroke appear compared to this base instrument of his plans: he still humbly kneels to the poor Richard and at least preserves the show of decorum, while Northumberland must be reminded of his bending knee by his excited king; he forbids the malicious tormentor, in the deposition-scene, any further urging; he pardons the arrested Carlisle, whose invectives had been hurled in his very presence. He came before Richard prepared for a stormy scene, ready for a part of feigned humility; but when Richard himself gives him the crown, it is perhaps only another kingly trait in his nature, it is certainly the act of a statesman, contrasting

him far more advantageously than detrimentally with the tardy, self-forgetful king, that he lays hold of the occasion so readily. No less skilfully had he, it must be admitted, prepared for it. Even before it becomes a personal question between him and Richard, he had begun, according to Percy's account, in the *feeling of his greatness*, to step somewhat higher than his original vow. He began to reform edicts and decrees, to abolish abuses, to win men by good measures and actions; he eradicated those hated favourites, he assumed to himself a protectorate, and accustomed the people to see kingly acts emanating from him before he was a king. In this manner, when wish and capacity, desire and endowments for ruling, were evidenced in him, the insurrection had already burst forth, before it showed itself in its true aspect. Cold and considerate compared to the fanciful, a profound statesman compared to the romanticist and the poet, a quick horseman, spurring the heavy, over-burdened Richard, bearing the misfortune of banishment with manly composure, and easing his nature by immediate search for redress, whilst Richard at the mere approach of misfortune immediately sinks, this man appears throughout as too unequal an adversary to the other, for the good right on the one side to stand its ground against his superior gifts. If, intoxicated by his first success, he had not so far lost himself, as to tread the path of John and Richard III. and give the hints for the murder of the king, (though only remote and indirect ones which he endeavoured subsequently to atone for by earnest repentance,) we should consider Bolingbroke's path to the throne, not guiltless but much justified. His first appearance on the throne, in any case, casts Richard's knightly endowments deeply into

the shade. The poet has here made excellent use of the corresponding history. The commencement-scene, which essentially exhibits to us Richard's conduct as a ruler, has in the 4th act a counterpart, which Shakespeare uses to exemplify Bolingbroke's dissimilar conduct in a similar position. Aumerle is accused by four nobles of the murder of Gloster, as once Bolingbroke himself had accused Norfolk, whom he wishes now honourably to recall and to reinstate in his possessions. Only one takes the side of Aumerle, and this is the half-brother of king Richard, a suspicious security. Bolingbroke could have suffered Aumerle, the most avowed favourite of Richard, to fall by the sword of the four accusers, and could thus have removed an enemy, but he does it not. Yet more: a newly projected plot of Aumerle's is discovered to the king; the father himself is the accuser of the son; the father himself protests earnestly against his pardon; but the yet-unconfirmed, illegitimate ruler scorns to shed the blood of relatives, a deed which cost Richard nothing. He pardons him; not out of weakness, for he punishes the other conspirators with death; he pardons him from humane and familiar motives, and schools him into a hero and a patriot. He does as that gardener would have had the lawful king do; with wise discretion, he rules with mercy and justice, mildness and severity. And at the same time, he behaves with that sure power and superiority, which permits him to jest in that very scene, and to act with that easy humour towards the zealous mother of York, when he has just discovered a conspiracy against his life.

The group of characters in Richard II. is arranged very simply in harmony with the suggestions given. In contrast

to the incapable legitimate king and his helpless inactive followers stands the rising star of the thorough statesman-like and royal usurper and his over-active adherents. In the struggle between right and merit stands Carlisle as the man of genuine loyalty, who knows no motive but fidelity and duty, who conceals not the truth from the lawful king, who ruins himself, and opposes unsparingly the shield of right to the usurper, who raises himself to power. Contrasted with him is the old York, whom Coleridge, in consequence of an incorrect apprehension of the character, has placed in a false opposition to Richard. The true picture of such an agitated age would be missed, if this character were wanting in it. He is the type of all political faint-heartedness, of neutrality, in times when partisanship is a duty, of that cowardly loyalty, which turns to the strong and powerful. When Richard is still in his full power, he considers he has gone too far, when he extols to the young king the virtues of his father. When Richard seizes the Lancastrian lands, his natural sense of right and his anxiety respecting his own property, urges him to utter impressive warnings, but when the king makes him, the inoffensive one, his governor in England, he allows himself to be appeased. Bolingbroke lands, and York sees through his project, and warns him not to take what he should not; his integrity even here shows him the path, which his weakness suffers him not to follow. He would like to serve the king and to discharge his duty to his lord, but he thinks also to have a duty of kinship and conscience respecting Bolingbroke's lawful claims to his inheritance. That he stood for the moment in the place of the king, he heeds not. Helpless what to do, he loses his head in unutterable

perplexity, but not his character. He will remain neutral. He sees the finger of God in the desertion of the people and lets it be; for Richard he has tears, few words, and no deeds. With loyalty such as this, countries go to ruin, while they prosper at usurpations such as Bolingbroke's. But that this weakness of the weak can amount to a degree, in which it becomes the most unnatural obduracy, and in which the cruelty of the usurper is guiltless when compared with it, Shakespeare has displayed in a truly masterly manner, when he suffers York to accuse his own son of high treason and to urge his death with pertinacity. He goes so far as to wish, that the king may ill thrive, if he grant any grace. In this trait conscientiousness and fidelity intermingle undistinguishably with the fear of seeing himself exposed and suspected. Such is servile loyalty; under the rule of the weak, it is weak and but a frail support, under that of the strong, it is strong and an efficient trustworthy power.

HENRY IV.

PART I.

The two parts of Henry IV., the latter of which was completed before the 25th February 1598, are a direct continuation of Richard II. ; the first embraces a period of only ten months (between the battles of Holmedon, 14th Sept. 1402, and that of Shrewsbury, 21st July 1403.), the second the interval from that time till Henry's death, nine years after. In both these pieces, Shakespeare follows Holinshed's chronicle, even in its errors. Thus he has allowed himself to be misled by it into blending in his Edmund Mortimer two persons of that name, uncle and nephew. In the history of the revolt of the Percys, Shakespeare faithfully uses the historical material, even in the most minute touches, with wonderful skill; the comic and serious parts of Prince Henry's youthful extravagances and his quarrel with his father, are worked out with poetic freedom on the ground of some vague indications in the chronicle. The poet would not have suffered these indications to excite his suspicion or disgust, had he known the critical writings of Luders and Tyler, who in our own day sought to set aside the

reproach of the youthful sins of Henry V. These hints, which appear unquestionable even to the eye of the historian, had been already dramatically used before Shakespeare in an older piece, written between 1580 and 1588, "the famous victories of Henry V.;" this is a rough piece, one of the most worthless histories of the pre-Shakespeare period, from which Shakespeare could borrow nothing, but a few isolated externals. Of Henry's youthful tricks, the chronicle has given no particulars beyond the story, that the prince once gave the Lord Chief Justice a box on the ear, and was arrested for it, and the farce, that another time he went to court in a dress stuck over with pins, to signify that he went on thorns as long as the crown was not his. Both these has the old piece admitted, both has Shakespeare rejected; the one with delicacy he has shifted behind the scene, the other absurd story he has changed into an action full of pathos and characteristic truth. Besides this, the older piece has given our poet respecting the wild scenes of Henry's youthful companions, nothing but a hint not to neglect these historical stories so capable of a popular treatment, and also a few names, the tavern at Eastcheap, Gadshill, Ned, Sir John Oldcastle. This latter was, as Halliwell has minutely proved*, originally the name of the fat knight in Shakespeare. We infer this indeed from some intimations in the piece itself: the prince's address to Falstaff, "my old lad of the castle", has only thus a meaning; and in the quarto-edition of the second part, the prefix *Old*. (Oldcastle) is still left before a speech of Falstaff's. The matter becomes a certainty from a quotation

* Halliwell, on the Character of Falstaff. 1841.

of the actor Nathaniel Field, who must have been best informed on this point*.

We mention this thus fully, because with this mere name, circumstances are linked, which furnish evidence of the great sensation, which Henry IV. caused at its appearance. In the series of histories Shakespeare takes the same leap in this piece, as in the series of erotic plays he does in *Romeo and Juliet*. But the effect must have been incomparably greater. For *Romeo* is a work, for the enjoyment of which only those of the greatest refinement of feeling in Shakespeare's select public were at that time qualified, but in *Henry IV.*, the richest entertainment was for spectators of every class. Shakespeare has altogether hardly written a piece of such fulness, of such diversity in fascinating and sharply drawn figures, which at the same time are of such a native cut and are interwoven with a subject so national and so universally interesting, a play, I may say, of such manifold and powerful force of attraction. When *Henry IV.* first appeared, an immoderate delight must have seized the spectators of every nature and of every position; a tumultuous joy must have been its effect; for the genius of a nation has never appeared on any stage in such bright cheerfulness and at the same time in such quiet modesty, as in these pieces. From the moment of their appearance the form of stage-productions and the act and manners of the poet were with one blow changed in England; not till the pioneering genius works with that dexterity and ease,

* In his piece, *Amends for Ladies*, printed 1618, he says: "Did you not see the piece in which the fat knight, named Oldcastle, told you truly what was honour": with evident allusion to the famous soliloquy in *Henry IV.* (I. Act V. sc. 3.).

that the labour of maturity is no longer remarked in his productions, that his art no more appears art, does he attract by the appearance of facility a crowd of imitators, — and this is first to be said of this play of Shakespeare's. From this time appears that train of the most prolific poets by profession, Ben Jonson, Marston, Thomas Heywood, Middleton, Chapman, and others, where previously all had been fragmentary effort, timid essay, and diletantism. Now there appeared in the plays a fresh free touch of life, where before even in the works of the unshackled Greene and Marlowe, the labour of art and learning had been too evident. Dramatic poetry now seemed to have loosened its tongue or to have grown its wings. The scenes from low life attracted spectators as well as poets; vulgar reality, and unfortunately also real vulgarity, became the character of stage-poetry, and for this unhappy turn the poet was indeed not accountable, for it was just here that he laboured with the highest moral severity. First of all the comic characters of the piece were imitated and repeated; Shallow occurs in his own name as a constant character in later dramas; the swaggerer Pistol is imitated numberless times, and Chapman says in 1598, that the word "swagger" itself was quite new and had been so quickly received, because it was created by a natural prosopopeia without etymology or derivation. The character of the stage-marvel Falstaff or Oldecastle was copied by Ben Jonson in *Tucca* in his *Poetaster*, and by Fletcher in his *Cacafogo*. But not on the stage alone did this character cause such a deep agitation and effect; the phenomenon was so extraordinary, that it gained ground and called forth a vast tumult in families and parties. Shakespeare found the name of John Old-

castle in the before-mentioned older piece of Henry V. ; in the chronicle he found a John Oldcastle, who was page to that duke of Norfolk, who plays a part in Richard II., and this, according to Shakespeare, *his* Falstaff (Oldcastle) had been in his youth. When the poet wrote his Henry IV., he knew not who this Oldcastle was, whom he had rendered so distinct with the designation as Norfolk's page; this was a Lord Cobham, who perished as a Lollard and Wickliffite in the persecution of the church under Henry V. The Protestants regarded him as a holy martyr, the Catholics as a heretic; they seized with eagerness this description of the fat poltroon, and gave it out as a portrait of Lord Cobham, who was indeed physically and mentally his contrast. The family complained of this misuse of a name dear to them, and Shakespeare declared in the epilogue to Henry IV., that Cobham was in his sight also a martyr, and that "this was not the man". At the same time he changed the name to Falstaff, but this was of little use; in spite of this express retraction, subsequent Catholic writers on church-history declared Falstaff to be still a portrait of the heretic Cobham. But it is a strange circumstance, that even now under the name of Falstaff an historical character is again sought for, just as if it were impossible for such a vigorous form not to be a being of reality. It was referred to John Fastolfe, whose cowardice is more stigmatized in Henry VI. than history justifies; and this too met with public blame, although Shakespeare could have again asserted, that he intended Fastolfe as little as Cobham. Still more indications may be enumerated of the general sensation excited by this theatrical monster. The name of the poet and his creation became a matter of speculation. Some

poets in association with Munday had dramatized the life of Oldecastle-(Cobham), and the piece was printed in 1600 under Shakespeare's name; the poet probably complained of this, for we possess impressions of the same year, 1600, on which the name is omitted.

In the two parts of Henry IV., the political theme which the poet had begun in Richard II., is continued. Richard's right, he has there shewn us, could not exempt him from the fulfilment of his duty; when he neglected this, he lost his title and his divine consecration. Legitimacy as such, joined even to a fine natural character, could not protect the crown for the king. From Henry IV.'s rule we shall learn, that royal zeal for duty on the other hand may indeed obtain the usurpation, but cannot atone for the injustice thus committed, and that an illegally gained kingdom is not secured from the greatest commotions by mere merit, joined even to the most able and crafty character. Even the idea of this historical retribution Shakespeare may have read in Holinshed's chronicle; it speaks of the cup of civil war as well deserved by the people, who had assisted Henry IV. against Richard, and of that punishment of commotion as just, which visited Henry IV. and his successors for the deposition of Richard II. The curse of the murdered king now reaches its fulfilment. Shakespeare does not mechanically represent this, as the chronicle does, as an arbitrary punitive decree of God, but as the necessary fruit of a natural seed in the characters and actions of men. The Earl of Warwick, when (II. Act III. sc. 1.) he interprets that curse to king Henry, says to him:

There is a history in all men's lives,
 Figuring the nature of the times deceas'd:
 The which observed, a man may prophesy,
 With a near aim, of the main chance of things
 As yet not come to life
 King Richard might create a perfect guess,
 That great Northumberland, then false to him,
 Would, of that seed, grow to a greater falseness;
 Which should not find a ground to root upon,
 Unless on you.

As this regards Northumberland, so is it also with Henry IV. In him also, his former disposition only develops itself in a new impulse, when it fills him with distrust of the Percys, his friends and helpers, as these were possessed with similar feeling to him.

The character of the king is worked out by Shakespeare with that perfect penetration which is peculiar to him, as a prototype of diplomatic cunning, and of complete mastery over fair appearance and all the arts of concealment. The difference between that which a man is and that which he appears, occupies the poet in this character as in Richard III. But Henry IV. is rather a master in concealment than in dissimulation; he cannot, like the other, play any part required with dramatic skill, he can only exhibit the good side of his nature, he can steal kindness and condescension from heaven, he is a Prometheus of diplomatic subtlety, and as Percy calls him, a king of smiles. That which separates him and his deep political hypocrisy from Richard III, as far as day from night, is that he possesses such a good side, and needs only to exhibit it and not to feign it. Far removed from authorizing murder, like the other, and delighting in the iron-hearted assassin, wading ever deeper from blood to blood and deadening

conscience, he has rather wished than ordered Richard's death and has cursed and exiled the murderer; conscience is roused in him immediately upon the deed, and he wishes to expiate largely for the once suggested bloodshed. At the close of Richard II. and at the beginning of this piece, we find him occupied with the idea of making a crusade to the Holy Land in expiation of Richard's death. Strangely in that reserved mind which fears to look into itself, the domination of a worldly nature interweaves itself with the stimulus of remorse; devout and serious thoughts of repentance are joined in this design with the most subtle political motives; earnestness of purpose and inclination to allow the purpose to be frustrated, jar in a manner which the poet has made perfectly evident in the facts, but not more evident in his reflections, than is natural to just such a nature. We may doubt whether the worldly man hesitates in arriving at the serious realization of his religious design, or whether by the decree of Heaven the expiation of that murder, by means of the natural consequences of his earlier deeds, was to be denied him. He is in earnest about the crusade, but mostly when he is ill; then fleet and army are in readiness. It has been foretold to him, that he shall die at Jerusalem (and he dies at last in a chamber which bears this name); when death is near, his haste and earnestness for the consecrated place of expiation becomes greater; but that in days of health also, he thinks on the pilgrimage, answers for the seriousness of his intention in general. This seriousness would not at such times have been so great in him, if political principles of the wisest circumspection did not prompt him to the same resolution, as that to which he was urged by prophecy, superstition, and conscience.

He would divert the evil sap from the land, he would lead the agitated spirits to the Holy Land, that "rest and lying still, might not make them look too near into his state"; in dying he bequeathed to his son the lesson of his domestic policy: that he should "busy giddy minds with foreign quarrels; that action, hence borne out, may waste the memory of the former days", the remembrance of his acquisition of the throne. He teaches the same policy, which in our days a pretender to the throne, an equally cunning aspirant, the heir like him of a revolution, and of a crown, partly given, partly surreptitiously obtained, sought to practise in Algiers, and for which he trained his sons, — he, too, escaping not the disquietude, which hung like a Nemesis over his head as over Henry's. One such a comparison of such a general political truth and doctrine, which our poet drew from the features of the history, is sufficient to characterize the historic-political wisdom which rested in his mind, joined to so many other intellectual qualities, and which may even allure the historian by profession to study his writings for his own art.

Just as in the beginning of our piece, the king had designed his plan for a crusade, the rumours of war in the north and west cross him; the Percys in the north had discomfited the Scottish Douglas, and in Wales, Glendower, with whom Henry had before fought in Richard's time, had taken Mortimer prisoner. In these tidings there lies a double blessing for Henry. A valiant enemy in the north is repulsed, and the defeat in the west is felicitous, for Mortimer is a descendant of Lionel of Clarence, the elder brother of Henry's father (Gaunt-Lancaster) who thus had a nearer claim to the throne than Henry IV. The oppor-

tunity is favourable to humble the powerful northern noble, the Percys, his old friends; they too on their side have become more powerful by the victory over Douglas, they had been long dangerous from the union of the young Percy with the sister (or aunt) of the pretender Mortimer, and from Worcester's hostile position towards the king and his insolent presumption on the merits of the Percys, they had become troublesome and threatening to his crown. The mutual mistrust which the false bear to the false, that old seed, springs up according to Richard's prophecy. The nobles must believe they can never be sufficiently rewarded for their service to the crown, the king must fear that they can never be satisfied with the greatest recompense. Those, who skilled in the arts of revolution, had once placed the king in competition with Richard, as an illegitimate rival, could at any moment oppose to him a legitimate pretender. The king versed in the secret arts of conspiracy, gives his former friends credit for them also; these who had seen him reject the instrument of Richard's murder, might fear that he would rid himself of them as readily. They urge to the last that they had recourse to revolt for the sake of their own safety; the king equally avows at length that their power made him apprehend his own deposition. The point at which gratitude, friendship, and love, culminate in envy, and then degenerate into rigour, hatred, and strife, is excellently exhibited in the first and third scenes of the first of the two pieces. Just there, where the Percys had rendered the king a service in the overthrow of the Douglas, and had proved themselves faithful, his mistrust seeks occasion for a breach; just there, where he most admires the young hero Percy, and prefers him to his own

son, his suspicion, or his policy, or his jealousy, or all together seek occasion against him; just where the impartial Blunt makes Percy's innocence truly evident, the king suffers all his uncompromising severity to rule; just where Mortimer was overcome and captured, he calls him a rebel, and thus makes him one. His suspicious and base policy preys into the actions of others, as if all were alike masters of Machiavellian arts; he goes so far as to impute to Mortimer an intentional defeat and a wilful betrayal of his people to Glendower. The open enmity with which the king had before dismissed the malicious Worcester from the council-table, the severity with which he now upbraids him with "the moody frontier of a servant brow" towards his majesty, and rejects him, urges the former friends of the king to defection; the loudly expressed mistrust shows them the very path to union with their former enemies.

Odious as the king shows himself in these circumstances, he yet proves himself, in the management of the conflict excited, to be the man born for power, as the poet depicted him at first. Wasted as he is by painful anxiety, consumed by suspicion not alone of the Pretender to the throne, who is weak, not alone of Percy, who is simple-hearted and honest, but also of his own son, who is further from nothing in his youthful pleasures than from political plots, agitated by scruples of conscience, which represent all these misfortunes to him as a punishment from God, he is nevertheless the same unbent man as ever, trusting in his human power, and prompt for action. In his undertakings against the rebels, his readiness, consistency, and firmness are equally great; no delay is to increase the enemy's

number and advantage. In the moment of decision previous to the battle, there is no lack of moderation and forbearance; after the fight, there is no want of generosity. The king meets, as he says, that which has become necessary as a necessity, and proves himself in all this, though menaced by a more dangerous civil war, to be a perfect contrast to the helpless Richard, who knew not how to defend a legitimate cause against a rising enemy. The Percys suffer in the first part a glorious defeat in arms, in the second part they fall diplomatically deceived in a clumsy manner. When thus the last adversaries of Henry are crushed, and his good fortune might have reached its prime, he is just then broken down by pain, affliction, and inward distress. The grandeur of his kingly purpose and the nature of his merit shows itself throughout in this, that, as he swears by sceptre and soul, he sees his dignity and right to the throne resting alone in qualification and in a right care of the state, and not in hereditary possession. The idea, therefore, torments him doubly, that his usurpation will be useless to his family, when he sees his son lost in the dissoluteness of youth and unworthy of his throne. The reserved, prudent, circumspect man possessed no standard for the indiscretion, the open nature, the veiled wisdom of his son. He sees him ruined like Richard by bad company; he sees Percy in contrast to him, as he himself was to Richard, although Percy was the greatest contrast to him, and Prince Henry was the greatest contrast to Richard. The pragmatic man knows only his own ratio, he knows not how to estimate natures, which lie beyond his range of vision. He imputes to his son the guilt of serving with Percy against him, as he had himself fought against his cousin Richard; he fears

that he may seek the crown from him and may be on the watch for his death, even after he has saved his life at Shrewsbury. In all he sees the punishment of God, and it is so. His afflicted mind is most afflicted, when on the summit of his good fortune and in the haven of outward security; he finds neither peace nor rest; and from the depths of his soul that lament arises (II. Act III. sc. 1.), that "with all appliances and means to boot" he finds not that sleep, which "upon the high and giddy mast seals up the shipboy's eyes". His hair is become white, the presentiment overtakes him that generation after generation shall raise and continue the internal strife and war; with immoderate satiety of life he says that

"The happiest youth, — viewing his progress through,
What perils past, what crosses yet to ensue, —
Would shut the book, and sit him down and die".

When he wished to go to the east, the civil war disturbed him; when twice the revolt becomes tremendous, he fears everything from his own blood; when it begins to be overthrown, he becomes sickly; when it is subdued, ill unto death; and at last when he is apparently dead, he must yet live to see that his son takes from him the crown. He believes, that he has the proof of the Prince's heartlessness and scheming. "Thou hid'st", he says to his son, (and into this poetic image Shakespeare has transformed the chronicled legend of the prince's pin-adorned dress),

"Thou hid'st a thousand daggers in thy thoughts;
Which thou hast whetted on thy stony heart,
To stab at half an hour of my life."

In his son's life he sees the proof that he loved him not, and in the hour of death he perceives the endeavour to

assure him of it. When the son's explanation quiets and convinces him, and lightens his dying hour, the deep dissembler at length unveils himself, and acknowledges by what by-paths and indirect crooked ways he had attained to the crown. Shortly before, with equal appeal to God, he had sworn (II. Act III. sc. 1.), that necessity alone had compelled him and greatness to kiss. In conversation with Warwick he had then protested, that at the time when Richard predicted the division between the Percys and himself, he had no design upon the crown. Interpreters point out this as a forgetfulness on the part of the poet, who allowed Richard to utter this prophecy, when Henry was already king; although with that unusual depth, with which Shakespeare has designed this whole character, his intention might have been to show, rather how in the moment of his sickness the liar and dissembler loses his true remembrance, and in the protestations of his innocence, plainly and by proof betrays his very guilt.

From this analysis of Bolingbroke's character, we perceive the political relation and bearing of Henry IV. to Richard II.; but from the profound treatment of the principal characters, the pieces are raised from the sphere of political historical plays into that of the true ethical dramas, the freer creations of Shakespeare; beyond the political theme of the pieces, there appears also a moral centre of thought, as we perceived above, and from the very same ground, in Richard III. At this kernel of the piece we arrive, when we attentively consider the principal figures, Henry Percy and Prince Henry of Wales.

Shakespeare makes Henry Percy, in order that he may obtain a more complete contrast to the Prince, of the same

age as the latter, although historically he is far rather contemporary with king Henry, and twenty years older than the Prince. He is the soul of the undertaking against the king, and the brilliant figure in the circle of the rebels, extorting love and admiration even from his enemies. Never was a more living character delineated in poetry; ballads designed to sing his glory, might borrow their boldest traits and images from this drama. Scarcely too is there a part more grateful to the actor; amongst the cleverest players of the older English school, Betterton hesitated, whether he should himself rather choose Percy or the most favourite of all parts, Falstaff. This doubt would hardly be conceivable to an actor in Germany, who knew himself as well qualified for Falstaff as Betterton was, because it belongs to a people accustomed to action, to estimate this character as it deserves. For Henry Percy is the ideal of all genuine and perfect manliness, and of that active nature, which makes the man a man. In jesting exaggeration, the Prince well characterizes him with the one touch, that he kills six or seven dozen of Scots at a breakfast, and says to his wife, "Eye upon this quiet life! I want work!" As a model of genuine chivalry, Shakespeare has drawn the lion-hearted youth with characteristics as refined as they are great. He gives him the name of the war-god; report compares his victories to Cæsar's; Achilles' motto is his: "the time of life is too short, to spend that shortness basely;" and when he has fallen, Henry says over his grave, what so often has been said of Alexander:

"When that this body did contain a spirit,
A kingdom for it was too small a bound;
But now, too paces of the vilest earth
Is room enough".

Still young, as the poet makes him, he has thrice beaten the Scottish Douglas and heaped upon his own head all the enemy's glory, he has at length gained immortal honour at Holmedon, and by this has excited the envy of the king. A keen ambition spurs him on like a proud horse, to suffer none to pass before him on his course of warlike and honourable action. If only this subject is spoken of, his language at once assumes the ardent exaggerated expression of a courage amounting to passion, of an even ostentatious heroism. Where he only forebodes a rival as in the Prince, a grudging jealousy can provoke him to the unknighly expression of a resolve, of the execution of which he could never be capable: — that he would "have him poisoned with a pot of ale"! When he hears of Henry's proud bearing before the battle of Shrewsbury, this jealousy urges him imprudently into the most dangerous actions. Danger has ever an alluring charm for him; when the goad of emulation is added to it, this decides him fully to venture on the unequal fight, and with the most painful impatience he leaves explanatory letters unread, and every earnest appeal to his military talent, to his foresight, and to his honour, unheeded. His courage makes him a sophist, as his quick passion occasionally makes him a statesman; two capacities which lie in direct opposition to his soldierly nature. For his blood boils up easily and violently; a "Hotspur", ardent by nature, he is full of caprices, always inwardly occupied as outwardly he is thirsting after action; in this activity he is forgetful and absent, robbed of appetite by day and of sleep by night, of excitable fancy, easily provoked, and in his irritation capable of passion, contradiction, and scorn towards all the world. In such moments his speech falters and vents itself with

stuttering rapidity, but the defect becomes him so that the young imitate it in him as an excellence. In repose, left to himself alone, he is pliable and yielding, like a lamb in his true unsuspecting nature. In private with Glendower, he allows him for nine hours to entertain him with the devil's names, although it disgusts him; in the presence of others, he crosses him with derision and reproach. Opposed, he covets a little piece of land, which he would gladly yield to a yielding claimant. Accused by the king of having denied the prisoners made at Holmedon, he excuses the refusal of the demand, but when the king gives him the lie and threatens him, he is at once no longer master of his pride and anger. With his heated imagination, which the mere idea of a great exploit carries beyond the bounds of patience and reflection, in a presaging mood, he utters bold schemes of revolt, and when his spirit is excited into violent passion, the political Worcester suggests his long-matured plans against Henry to the "quick conceiving discontents" of the hot-blooded youth. This blind passion throws the spotless hero into treacherous connections, it leads the resolute man into league with the undecided and the weak, the warrior and soldier into schemes with artful diplomatists, the man of valour and fidelity into alliance with traitors and cowards, the man himself imprudent into undertakings imprudently designed. And when candid advisers suspect these plans and his friends, the upright man bears ill-will against the upright counsellor, because he himself does not believe in dishonesty. From this passionateness, this want of penetration and knowledge of human nature, the trustful man perishes, as the want of self-command, which leads him to immoderate ebullitions and imperious blame, forms, according to Worcester's opinion,

the principal blemish in the extreme beauty of his character. For beyond this, there is no ignoble vein in the man. Perfectly true and of a golden heart, far removed from all malice, inaccessible to cunning and deceit, his nature is utterly at variance with the vile and corrupt policy and diplomacy of the king. He is nettled and scourged with rods, if he only hears of it; and when the king imputes to Mortimer the crime of having intentionally given himself up as a prisoner to Glendower, his indignation bursts forth in his presence: "never did base and rotten policy colour her working with such deadly wounds." Because he is so utterly averse to all untruth, he is heartily angry at Glendower's whimsical bragging. Praise and flattery he cannot hear, blame he cannot suppress, even if he should offend new and insecure friends by it. At such moments he suffers his vehemence and roughness to be reproved, and scornfully blesses manners more refined and commended. An enemy to all affectation, to all appearance, and vanity, he is an enemy also to all false unmanly refinement. He would rather hear "a dry wheel grate on an axle tree" than mincing poetry, he would rather be "a kitten and cry — mew", than be a ballad-monger; and music and singing he thinks "the next way to turn tailor, or be red-breast teacher". Averse to these tender arts, he is so also to all false sentimentality. The charming scene between him and his wife shows that he loves because he banters; no other expression for its love could this unaffected nature find. How could Ulrici imitate the absurd Horn, in saying that Percy's wife was only his chief-servant! Where does it lie in Henry Percy's character to swear on horseback to his wife, that he loves her infinitely, if these were only empty words to a servant? These hearts rest

closely and firmly, on the certain superiority of the husband and on the golden confidence of the wife, who possesses the rare quality of understanding the fervour of her husband's love in his jests and banterings, and from whose remembrance this "miracle of men" can never pass away. In short, to trace back this character and indeed our two pieces, to the point at which we started: honour lives and moves in this man as in its own abode, it is the virtue of the soldier in contrast to the equivocal and diplomatic honour of the cabinet, which distinguishes the king. The honourable Douglas renders homage to the Hotspur Percy as to "the king of honour". He is "the theme of honour's tongue", it is said, whilst dishonour stains the brow of Prince Henry. He will go through any danger "from the east unto the west, so honour cross it from the north to south". It seems to him

"an easy leap,
 To pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon;
 Or dive into the bottom of the deep,
 And pluck up drowned honour by the locks;
 So he, that doth redeem her thence, might wear,
 Without corrival, all her dignities!"

The impatience of his ambition and his jealousy of honour, is expressed in this, that he is on fire, when he only hears Prince Henry praised. The Percys reflect with repentance on the mortification of Richard, the world's tongue rebukes them for the old misdeed, and the young hero especially wishes to wash away this stain from the honour of his house. The time serves, he thinks, to redeem banished honour; it seems to him intolerable to bear the outrage, and to be discarded and shaken off by him, for whom the shame was undergone. In his ardour, it is not possible for him to

reflect that the means for this effacing of dishonour must heap new dishonour upon them, and that the motives are selfish. The revolt in league with enemies of the land, for the object of dividing the kingdom, the "ill weaved ambition" which set it going, remains a blemish on his shield of honour, but the only one; and even this ignominy, says Prince Henry, shall sleep with him in the grave, and not be remembered in his epitaph. This conquest is made by the honourable hero even in death over his victor. He makes it also over the reader. This has no one expressed more significantly than Hazlitt, who would not have been sorry if Northumberland had come in time, and had decided the battle at Shrewsbury in Percy's favour.

Great and admirable when considered alone, Percy increases extraordinarily in might, when we see him in the company of his fellow-conspirators. "Could the world," says Falstaff, "pick out three such enemies again, as that fiend Douglas, that spirit Percy, and that devil Glendower?" But if we see Percy associated with the others, we perceive how high he stands *above* those, whom Falstaff placed *beside* him. The Scottish Douglas is nearest to him; he has the bravest place in his heart's love, as Douglas on the other hand tells him, that no man except him breathes so potent upon the earth, whom he would not "beard". True like Percy, brave like him without consideration and caution, inaccessible like him to fear, he has also somewhat of the national ostentation, which is likewise not foreign to Percy; and thus their blustering mode of speaking is altogether similar, the idea often being misty without the connection of a subordinate thought. But the intellectual height, the poetic enamel, that moral core of chivalry,

which ennobles Hotspur's character, are wanting to the dry Scot; and therefore the old enemy, after the first personal contact, submits so readily to this sovereignty of mind, and implicitly acknowledges Percy to be the king of honour. His valour is rather of an instinctive character compared to that of Percy, which is excited by all the brilliant ideas of ambition; he is the Sickingen in the school of a Hutten. — Still further removed is the Welshman, Owen Glendower; without this counterpart, Percy would perhaps with his romantic valour and ostentation have appeared as a refined caricature; when this is placed beside him in Owen, he modestly moves back to the stand of human nature. Vanity excites the Welshman to all that, towards which honour and the noblest self-reliance impels Percy; even to his bragging, which flows with Percy from exaggerated ardour. The false appearance of honour urges Glendower indeed to adventurous deeds of war, but the reputation of natural strength is not sufficient for him; he aspires after the renown of miraculous abilities and faculties, he would like to see the superstitious world tremble before his greatness, and he boasts of commanding the powers of hell. In opposition to the deluding magician, Percy places his pride in modest truth, in contrast to the marvel-loving, stands his plain rational theology, he calls his vain-glory the "unprofitable chat of a Welshman", and how should his self-praise please the man, who could not suffer the commendation of another! From vanity, Glendower unites to his valour learning and study, music and poetry, those arts of the Muses which Percy considers unsuitable to the soldier; from vanity, and from a desire to have weight in everything, he is skilled in all the social and courtly arts, which Percy despises. Percy

is stung with impatience and pain in the scene, in which Owen's daughter sings to Mortimer; that weakness, that extravagant sentimentality, are so contrary to his nature, and the whole conduct is so far removed from the healthful relations between him and his wife. The unnaturalness of his union with dissimilar beings is felt indeed by his sensitive instinct, yet he is not capable of bringing reflection to bear on this aversion, which might have warned him and inspired him with mistrust. "Tell truth," he had said to Glendower, "and shame the devil"; but Glendower feared the devil, and was untrue and unfaithful. Like Mortimer, who stands among all as an irresolute tool, a pretender, who ought to feel the sharpest stimulus of honour on account of his high aim, and who possesses not its smallest impulse, like Mortimer he is slowly induced to join the rebel at the place of meeting, and on the decisive day he comes not, being superstitiously "o'erruled by prophecies". — Still worse is it with Percy's own relations. His father Northumberland, smooth as ever, calm and coldly restrained, at the most formed to win a new member to the conspiracy, and not created to help in the work of arms, is in the decisive moment "crafty sick"; he breaks his word, he remains causelessly and dishonourably behind, and thus infects the very life-blood of the enterprise. Thus the battle against the king could not be won, for on his side fought the noble Blunt and a host of others like him, who in royal disguise sacrificed themselves for their king! Yet in spite of this the bloody ruin of the conspirators would have been avoided, if the uncle Worcester had not been still less true and honourable than the father Northumberland. He who had fastened the knot, causes with the same malice its bloody

solution. It is a historical fact, that he forged the king's offer of mercy; in our piece he delivers not the prince's challenge to Percy, which might have atoned for the quarrel with less blood, in accordance with the prince's mind. Thus at once into destruction and ignominy he draws his nephew, whom youth and ardour would have excused in Henry's sight, and who in his childlike piety had no distant presentiment as to the nature of his father and his uncle.

It would be difficult to any poet, to raise up another hero superior to this. But least of all should it appear, that Shakespeare had wished or ventured to place his prince Henry before him. Thus at least it could not have appeared to the interpreters, who discovered a kind of injustice, an inconsistency, in Percy's fall through Henry after the early relations between the two. His own father indeed calls the Prince, in contrast to that king of honour, almost a king of ignominy, and declares Percy more worthy of the throne than his own son! The Prince, in league with the low mob, is more dishonourably in war against the state, than Percy! Ridiculing all knightly customs, he fights at tournaments with the glove of base prostitutes on his spear! He has even laid hands on the Lord Chief Justice and has been for this placed in confinement and expelled from the Privy Council! Where in such a man could lie the right and the talents to be lord over a hero so splendidly endowed as Percy, unless some accident of history or an inconceivable caprice on the part of the poet dictated this conclusion, which seems to accord ill with the just laws of a well organized world, such as that into which we wish poetry to transport us.

The prince indeed in his first soliloquy announces to us,

that he is in perfect consciousness concerning the wild actions of his youth, that he will one day throw off this loose behaviour, and redeem time lost. Frivolity seems accompanied with prudence and reflection, and behind the mask of folly we seem to hear a wise man speaking. We will attentively follow up this double part, that we may find out the true nature of this cameleon. For how easily might that soliloquy be imagined less strong and solemn, than it is spoken! Has not Franz Horn, after his fashion of seeing humour like Corporal Nym everywhere in Shakespeare, regarded even this soliloquy as the mere irony of the poet?

When we know the prince upon his first appearance, he is in friendly association with thieves and rogues, he is their protector and advocate, he screens their misdeeds with his dignity, he conceals and denies their persons, he himself assists at their robberies. But on the other side, he compensates for the base trick by paying back the money taken with advantage, and he joins the base trick only when a mad trick accompanies it; he undertakes it for once, when a good joke is gained by it for ever.

For, indeed, to avoid a good joke is difficult to him. Of an excitable nature, laughter-loving, merry, unbridled, he gives way to a wild youthful love of liberty, which Percy despises in him. The smallest occasion can stir up this merry mood in him, and once excited, he is ready for the maddest pranks possible. He is considered by his father like king Richard, in whose company were "shallow jesters and rash bavin wits", and thus it is difficult for Henry, master as he is of quibbles and puns, to check a witty word on a good occasion. He has with refined cleverness selected a society, where all elements meet, by mixture and contact

with which a boundless material for mirth, raillery, and bantering is created. But if this unbridled conduct damps the hopes upon the prince, if his wildness may be misconstrued, yet there are glimpses at times, which show us that to him it is only a recreation, not a habit. The chronicle also represents him as indulging in this propensity only in the intervals between warlike and sober action. Falstaff continues to trifle even in the battle, but not he; before his father he is grave and full of childlike devotion. It may appear, as if he only wanted so long as there was time, to create an antidote to that conventional life and its poison, which is strongest on the throne; he vents himself in a youthful paroxysm over the common-placeness of the vocation of his life. He may appear like the young Richard, but he carries not perseveringly his mirthful frivolity into serious business, and he stands forth as a master in self-command, no trace of which is to be discovered in Richard's character. There might be even some prudent calculation mingled with the joviality of the Prince, to whom sedateness was not altogether foreign; "for it is a thing," says Bacon, "political beyond imagination, to be able to pass readily from jest to earnest, from earnest to jest." He seems to behave like a man, who wishes to follow the wise maxim which the same Bacon has clothed in these words: "whilst philosophers dispute, whether all is to be referred to virtue or pleasure, gather thou the means for both."

Richard II.'s intercourse was one with relatives and nobles, at least outwardly equal in birth. Prince Henry on the contrary roves about with men of the lowest class. It is not even the intellectual excellence of the wit, which exclusively charms and attracts him. His game with the young drawer shows us his harmless delight even in the

most innocent jokes; he roams about with vintners, with whom he assumes the greatest air of courtesy, so that Falstaff, compared to him, appears an insolent proud fellow. This condescension is blamed by the king, whose art it was, to show himself like a feast, seldom but sumptuous, sparing the courtesy which his son lavishes extravagantly. According to that soliloquy, however, the prince too seemed to act from a policy not dissimilar. He would imitate the sun, which conceals itself behind the clouds, that it may be more wanted and more wondered at; he practises his clever sinfulness upon the same principle of "rare accidents", only he seemed, if he did not presume too far, to wish to apply this principle as a great man. It was not his person, his robe of majesty, that was to form the "rare accident", the surprise, the sun-gleam, the holiday, but his deeds. As long as he was not directly called to these, he shunned not to turn from the artificial nature round the throne to the original characters, the expressive creations of the lower classes. He takes pleasure in human nature in its open bareness, and in its naked form; poverty of mind and of necessaries is a study for him; his plain homely nature, contrasted with Percy's knightly aristocratic bearing, is most at ease among the true-hearted fellows of Eastcheap, who call him a good boy, and tender him their service, when he shall be king of England. Perhaps there is policy even in this, that he seeks to win the hearts of the people, when so little reliance can be placed on the nobles, and his father's throne continually totters before their assault.

With these propensities, the prince wastes much time; idle, careless, as soon as no positive business binds him, he is away from the court, like a son, who is ill at ease in the narrow home-circle. To his wild tricks, his madness, his

condescension, is added the idleness of this carousing life, for which reason the king ever holds before him the active life of Harry Percy. To the prince, a drinking-bout with drawers is counted as a battle, and he pities Poins, that he has lost much honour, because he was not with him in the action. — But then he appears before Vernon with self-accusation, chiding the idleness of youth, which in Percy's eyes too was a blemish in the prince; and even before, in a casual expression, he appeared to wish to insinuate, that Percy's example was not to be lost upon him, when he says to Poins, that he is not yet of Hotspur's mind, with whom a breakfast of slain Scots proclaims an idle day's work. And that at some future time he might attain to this humour, seems to lie in his very nature, as even his father says of him, that in early youth he was indeed wanton and effeminate, but desperate also.

The prince at last pursues that which his father and which Percy regard as most sacred and most solemn,—chivalry and honourable activity in war and state; but he does it with a careless levity and even degradation, and instead of fame and honour he heaps only ignominy on his head. While he considers not the highest judiciary of the kingdom as sacred, the knightly tournament appears to him not too serious to allow of his making sport with it; when his father's throne is shaken by the most valiant hero on British soil, he is capable of acting a ludicrous comedy, and he comes playing on his general's staff to call his merry companions to the field. But if this may be called levity, it may also be calmness of mind. He trembles not in the least before the frightful alliance of Percy, Douglas, and Glendower. Lies there not at the bottom of his composure at this revolt, a firm consciousness and self-reliance? Does not a good conscience

appear through this carelessness, this wantonness, this unrestraint, whilst his father oppressed with suspicion and anguish, suffers in his prosperity? In the silent manner, in which he hears his father's suspicion, how much humility and good childlike nature! And then, when it is necessary, when the severe fight at Shrewsbury is threatened, does it not surprise us all after this unrestrained life and conduct, as it surprises Percy, when Vernon sketches that splendid picture of the prince and his companions, like that of ostriches and eagles that wing the wind? Does it not appear as if necessity alone could call him to show himself just as valiant and eager for war, as Percy is always from a strong natural impulse?

The young son of the king stands depreciated among his companions, by his relatives, and by his foes. A notorious offence disgraces him in the eyes of the world, even Poins interprets his character badly, his brothers give him up, his father considers him capable of every misdeed, the honour which Percy heaps upon his own head, eclipses him all the more. On which shall we rely in this character, — on the evil appearance, which we have exhibited, or on the sparks of honour and of a better nature, which throughout we see glancing forth, and which might indicate a kernel of the rarest quality?

The idea, which we have seen Shakespeare pursue throughout this whole period of his life, and which we saw at its height in the Merchant of Venice among the series of the non-historical pieces of this date before discussed, this idea is exhibited in this character in its most perfect development. Appearance is against this wonderful man. Indifferently, indeed even wilfully, he fosters this show of evil,

whilst and because in himself he is sure of the perfect essence of a genuine humanity. He sports with public opinion, because any hour he can give it the lie. On the accusations of sins worthy of death, he has in his proud self-reliance no answer, but deeds. A many-sided, versatile being, he suffers life to influence him from all sides; he wishes to enjoy it as long as it offers him room for enjoyment, but in this leisure for recreation and jesting, he wishes like the Macedonian Philip, and like the Egyptian Amasis, only to steel and strengthen himself for the time of action and seriousness. In Poins, there is no relation between his turning from absurd tricks to valiant work, and from this again to frivolous talk, but this two-sidedness of nature shines in the prince in the most wonderfully vivid colours. Buffoon and hero, condescending and proud, a king in transactions with princes, and a beggar with beggars, he knows how to touch by turns every key-note of society and of office, of business and of festivity, of exertion and of relaxation, — a master in each. The king is obliged almost against his will to bear witness of him, that although being incensed, he's flint, that he is as "humorous as winter, and as sudden as flaws congealed in the spring of day", he yet is gracious and has a tear for pity, and "a hand open as day for melting charity." The transition from self-forgetfulness in his wild fancies to an act of perfect self-command, costs him only a reflection; in his ardour he struck the Lord Chief Justice, and immediately he obeys the arrest; the king himself acknowledges the victory over self, in this yielding to the laws he had just violated. He is of the opinion, that it is the task of human life to do justice to every circumstance and occasion, to give due time to every-

thing, to assign to each its place and position, to disdain nothing which brings us into contact with the varieties of existence. To conform himself hourly to the monotony of royal dignity, was in opposition to his free soul; with intense effort to pursue glory and honour as the compulsory service of a business imposed upon him, seemed to him in contradiction to the regulations of nature, who is moderate in her demands; he had not patience nor strength of habit enough to act the stoical earnestness of a scrupulous conscientiousness; it was not given to him to impose on himself on all occasions the restraint of habit, even though that habit should have been directed to the highest aim. That which with Hamlet is a principle only of words, is with him one carried into effect:

"Rightly to be great,
 Is, not to stir *without great argument*;
 But greatly to find quarrel in a straw,
When honour's at the stake".

And essentially in this principle is he a contrast to the fiery Percy, who in his passion certainly grows angry over "the ninth part of a hair", even where no honour is at stake.

Following out this principle, the thin, versatile, frivolous prince makes use of his time, as long as it is given him, for jesting and mirth. As soon as he has heard from his father, of what they hold him capable, of watching for his father's death, of treachery against his father's throne, he is struck with dismay, unsuspecting of having stood so low in the opinion of others. Hereafter he will be more himself, and he proves in his combat, how truly and helpfully he stands by his father's side. When he hears that Percy is so immeasurably preferred before him, his jealousy is awakened against this

favourite of fame. For deeply seated in him also, is that fire of honour, but it must be struck out of him by the steel of greater demands. He acknowledges of himself, that if ambition is a sin, he is the most sinful being in the world. He now seeks to meet this envied ideal of all chivalry in single combat and in the battle, and he proclaims to him that he shall not any more *share* the glory with him; two stars such as they cannot keep "their motion in one sphere". He has predicted it, when he stood blushing with disgrace before his father, that in the day when they met, he would scour his shame from his face with all the honour "sitting on the helm" of this child of renown, that he would exchange his indignities for Percy's glorious deeds, or cancel his vow by death. Percy had gathered on his own head the honour of the Scottish Douglas, and these heaped-up honours Henry again will take from him; he shall be but the *factor* of his own honour. And thus urged by this smouldering fire of ambition, he encounters Percy's flaming passion for glory; the modest man meets his despiser, the idler in knightly deeds, meets the master of chivalry, and he overcomes him, in no wise because the arbitrary fancy of the poet so willed it, but because the good cause thus required it, and the good powerful nature of the prince thus permitted it, a nature in which qualities were inherent, which far outshone even the great gifts of Harry Percy.

For now, when the victory over Percy has given him a higher position, now truly appears that which makes him greater than this great one. He stands over the conquered with admiration, with forgiveness, with emotion and pity. It had been his burning ambition to kill Percy; and now it is done, the flame is at once extinguished, and gives place

to the beautiful human emotions of the heart. And yet more; he gives to the foolish Falstaff the honour of having killed Percy, in the intention of re-establishing his old friend's sullied honour by yielding him this renown; he silently suppresses his self-confidence, and renounces a fame only just obtained; with ready modesty he strips the glory from himself, the first time that it falls upon his misjudged life, with a feeling within of that highest honour and dignity, which is content with the self-consciousness and needs not the outward honour. The consideration of human frailty which the fall of the noble Percy forces upon him, the foreboding words which the dying man addresses to him, have effaced in him all worldly vanity, and in this moment of exaltation, the epicurean youth, in whose soul is a full-toned chord in harmony with every occasion, is capable of the most stoical self-denial. In this moment of solemn elevation the supposed death of Falstaff goes not to his heart, and in the following moment he suffers his own merit, without priding himself upon it, to pass silently to the unworthy one. This trait is as little unpremeditated by the poet, as that of the prince's valour and military science. For in this character, the qualities of self-denial and self-mastery, disdain of show, a resting upon that inmost, hidden worth, the kernel of human existence, these lie indeed expressed in his very faults. For only for this reason was he unbridled, because he was conscious of having the reins in his hand, only therefore was he condescending and generous of his presence, because he knew himself kingly, only lazy and idle, because he had learned more easily than others, only given up to the indulgence of mirth, because he knew what serious days awaited him. And in

all his self-indulgence, that one trait lies predominantly as a foundation, — to be true and faithful to nature, to put no constraint on her, and not to overstrain her; and in this natural condition she preserved for him healthful fresh powers, which achieved with trifling ease that which others obtained not with all their efforts. For contrasting his character, so free from show, with that of the glorious Percy, he stands in comparison to the latter as the secure possessor of honour to the striving competitor for it, that honour which Bacon calls "the abode of virtue", *towards* which the motion of virtue is impetuous, *within* which it is calm. Hence it is that Henry has nothing of the intense or exaggerated, of the pathetic and vehement of Percy's nature, and he, therefore, ridicules the excessive restless straining of the other's powers, when he notwithstanding overtakes him at the goal, as soon as the summons and the demand upon him are evident. When the occasion and the object call forth his powers, he appears famous without effort, valiant without ostentation, transformed to a new life, without the necessity of any sacrifice. The most opposite qualities of refinement and amiability, of vigour and energy, form in him the rarest combination, of which Percy could not be susceptible. Compared with the latter's passionate temperament, he is quite composed; the proud opinion of himself is in him self-reliance with the calmest modesty. Percy has ever borne a jealous ill-will against Henry, but the milder Henry only jests over him, and after his death he weeps for him, which Percy would never have done for Henry. He acknowledges Douglas' merit as well as Percy's, in life and in death, and even when he jests over him, as upon his relation to his wife, he jests not out of a desire for mockery, but out of a love of laugh-

ter; for just in this very part he would most closely have resembled Percy, and not very different to the manner in which he woos his french Katharine, Percy might have also wooed his. In contrast to Percy's ebullitions of passion, his self-mastery is opposed throughout, to Percy's coarse manners is contrasted his affability and kind amiability, to Percy's overflowing feelings, moderation and dignity, to Percy's boastful vein, a quiet disregard of himself, so that in this respect Percy readily appears when compared with Henry, as Glendower compared with Percy. But all this appears so much the greater, when Henry, as soon as a just cause demands it, shows himself possessed of all Percy's splendid qualities, of his bold daring, of his proud self-reliance, and of all the indications of a noble passion. In short, to gather all together, where the one seeks to give a brilliant foil to his glorious deeds and qualities, he places a dark contrast to his qualities in his youthful life, and hides the light of his virtues behind the shadows of his faults. And then: when his actions first disclose these his true qualities, he effaces them yet again with careless indifference, as they rise most brilliantly from the dark background, confident of a something within him elevated above all show, in comparison with which all outward honour appears as empty vanity, — confident of a core of genuine humanity, of a power of will, and of preparation for the life, which indeed like a sun shall break through all around him, even self-created clouds.

It strikes us at once, in what relation Falstaff, the fourth principal figure in the first part of Henry IV., stands to the rest. Henry has it at heart to preserve the royal honour he has acquired to himself and to his house; an ardent love of

honour urges him to maintain himself in this position in spotless esteem; it grieves him, therefore, that his son should threaten to forfeit this honour by his unbridled conduct. That which in his own reputation and life might darken its splendour, he seeks with a thousand arts to hide deep within his secret heart. He conceives of honour outwardly, and refers it only to the rank and the position which he fills; morality has nothing to do with his love of honour; appearance only is to be saved and his honour maintained in the esteem of the world. With Percy this is otherwise. The honour after which he aspires, he wishes to deserve by action and by moral worth; from the honourable feelings of the bravest heart, his ambition springs, upborne by a noble pride till it swells into a thirst for glory, which danger only provokes the more, and even the injustice of the means is overlooked in its aim. Different again is prince Henry's relation to honour. He is animated by the same ambition, by the same desire for glory as Percy, but it could never rise to that morbid thirst as in Percy, because it is of a more profound nature. It is not pride, but noble self-reliance which urges him forward; to satisfy himself, is of more importance to him than to stand well in others' esteem; he spiritualizes and refines the idea of honour into the true dignity of man, and the consciousness of this possession in himself, consoles him even through the appearance of baseness and through the bad opinion of the world. To all these Falstaff stands as a contrast. By the side of these heroes of honour, he seems utterly deprived of all sense of honour and of shame: and to imitate dignity even in play, is not possible to him. A respect for the opinion of others, a need of self-esteem, are foreign to him; it is selfishness alone which places this

machine in motion. In this contrast especially we will look at this remarkable character, who, like a living acquaintance, is on the lips and in the knowledge of all. To analyze it in all its fulness, would be besides just as difficult as it would be unacceptable, because the critical analysis of a comic character cannot but destroy it, without compensating for this as in a noble character, by the grand conception which comes more distinctly into view through the analysis itself.

We have before said, that Shakespeare makes his John Falstaff a page of the duke of Norfolk. At this period of his youth, we learn that he had intercourse and a quarrel with one Scogan; this name, which is that of a well-known jester under Edward IV., whose frolics were published in 1565, the poet uses to denote Falstaff's early society and circumstances. Since this, he had been 32 years with Bardolph, and 22 years with Poins in the course of life in which we find him, he has grown old and is the head of the jovial company, he is a born king of drink and a constant frequenter of the houses where eating and drinking are the best. It may be, therefore, that although he assures the Lord Chief Justice, that he was born with his round belly, he rather speaks the truth to the Prince, when he says that in his youth he was thin as an eagle's talon, and that drunkenness and idle living had in course of time blown him up like a bladder, so that he could no longer see his own knee. The picture of a mass of indolence and incapability for action, he is the personification of the inferior side of man, of his animal and sensual nature. All that which is the spiritual part of man, honour and morality, refinement and dignity, has been early spoiled and lost in him. The material has smothered in him every

passion, for good or for evil; he was perhaps naturally good-natured, and only from trouble and bad company became ill-natured, but even this ill-nature is as short as his breath, never sufficiently lasting to become real malice. His form and his mere bulk condemn him to repose and love of pleasure; laziness, epicurean comfort, cynical meanness, and idleness, which are only a recreation for his Prince, are for him the essence, nature, and business of life itself; and whilst Percy loses appetite and sleep amid the excitement of his striving spirit, Falstaff on the contrary is all care about his subsistence. In virtue, therefore, of this animal excess and demand, and the moral stupefaction which is its result, he holds to the natural right of animals: if the young dace be a bait for the old pike, he sees no reason in the law of nature but that he may snap at the simple, the insipid, the dull, the brisk among mankind. He therefore not only carries on his game for the oppression of all, over whom he can secretly gain command, without feeling for the property, welfare, and right of another, but he also employs his more versatile companions for open robbery and stealing; he surrounds himself with the Gadshills, who stand in such bad repute that the carriers on the highway like not to trust them with a lantern, and he even tries to use the Prince as a means for robbing the exchequer; and his fancy mounts so far, that after the Prince's accession to the throne he would like to banish law and gallows, and to ennoble the nightly trade of the robber.

Opposed to every political and judicial regulation, opposed to every moral precept, the preponderance of the material nature has made him obtuse, and thus opposed to all intellectual nourishment. His wit, the only mental gift

which he possesses, must itself serve to his subsistence; at least in the *Merry Wives of Windsor* he prepares it expressly with this business-like object, to escape want. Want and necessity, it is said in *Tarlton's Jests*, is the whetstone of wit, and it is even so with Falstaff. This may relate especially to his ingenuity in fraudulent tricks, but the merely intellectual side of his wit might also be referred to his physical heaviness. His mere appearance attracts attention to him and provokes men to mock him; he affords a picture of the owl, bantered by the birds. This position alone calls forth in self-defence those powers of wit, which for the most part do not spring from immediate natural capacity. In all witty and satirical power in men, the innate part rests only in a general manner on a nature, negative, realistic, and less adapted for action; the essential in this power is its training and cultivation, as it lies entirely in the keen, well-exercised sense of comparison, and consequently in the most versatile and manifold observation and practice. This habit becomes another nature; it must have been so in Falstaff all the more early and completely, the earlier his mere appearance provoked the attacks of wit. Falstaff says of himself in a complete characterization, "that no man was more able to invent anything that tends to laughter, than he invented, or was invented on him; that he was not only witty in himself, but the cause that wit was in other men." But the passive part of this two-sidedness is necessarily the more original; and however quickly his natural gifts might have led Falstaff from the defensive to the offensive, it yet appears, as if his unwieldiness ever drove him back to the former, as if he needed his repose disturbed, as if his wit required continual

and sharp provocation. For this the persons around him are well calculated. The witty versatility of the Prince keeps him for ever out of breath; the red-nosed Bardolph, the butt of his superior quiet humour, is for recreation; but even the sharp Poins, who understands teasing and tormenting better than to be teased, he cannot do without. With such cold people on the other hand as the Lord Chief Justice and Lancaster, his wit is cold, and when his company sinks lower, his wit sinks also. That which we have a thousand times observed in phlegmatic men, rises to its height in Falstaff; in men of this nature, the gifts of quiet penetration, and of keen observation and knowledge of human nature are peculiar, and in the contrast between their mental versatility and their bodily helplessness, lies the comic power of their appearance. It is all the greater, the more dry and involuntary is the wit; thus is it with Falstaff, and it is always an utter mistaking of the part, when the actors themselves, even older English ones like Quin, display an intention of wit; but perfectly on the contrary has Hazlitt distorted this character, when he maintains that Falstaff is a liar, a coward, and a wit, and all these only to amuse others, to show the humorous side of these qualities; an actor himself just as much as on the stage. Falstaff is indeed so far conscious of his jesting powers, that he knows what makes the Prince laugh; but in their exercise in every single instance, the perfect instinct of habit and nature alone, and never a well-calculated play is to be manifested. His whole comic power lies in his unintentional wit, and in his dry humour; the natural talent of mother-wit will ever thus appear; comic genius, like genius of every kind, moves in an undistinguishable line between

consciousness and instinct. It is just this happy medium which Shakespeare assigned to his Falstaff; and *this* medium, and that also, according to which he is bantering and bantered, a mark for wit just as much as a dealer in it himself, assigns to him the social position in which we ought ever to have seen him. The life and literature of those times distinguished between the popular and the court-fool, between the unschooled mother-wit in the one, and the mask of wisdom in the other, between the clown and the fool, between the man who by nature and exterior provoked the love of laughter and raillery among the people, and that one who is schooled to ridicule honest folly, between the man to whom a well-practised roguery is wit, and another who performs his pranks only with his tongue. Falstaff not indeed in an official function, unites both species of jesters in his person, with a natural preponderance of the former, difficult to be distinguished, as was the case with the famous Tarlton, about whom contemporaries were continually disputing, whether his wit was natural or artificial. If we would wish to learn what life and reality afforded to the poet for this picture of Falstaff's and his friends' tricks, their roving over the country, their raillery of each other, their deceptions towards hosts, maidens, simpletons &c., we have only to open Tarlton's Jests; we shall then at once perceive how the poet has given an ideal form even to this vulgar realist. But if we will have the soul, the idea of Falstaff's nature and being, we must apply to him what Erasmus in his Praise of Folly lays stress upon as the characteristic of popular and court-fools. They take, he says, nature for their guide; they strip off the gloss of refinement and follow animal instinct; they have no

conscience, they fear no ghosts, they have no hopes nor cares, they laugh and make others laugh, we forgive all that they say and do, they have no passion, no ambition, no envy and no love, no shyness and no shame.

In truth, to return here to Falstaff's moral being, in the words *no conscience* and *no shame*, all is expressed, which we require for acquaintance with him. At times indeed he has attacks of remorse, and these render evident, that man's better nature even under such a great material burden is never quite lost. His companions call him Mr. Remorse. When he is in fear, in sickness, or in idleness, he bemoans his vile behaviour with involuntary ejaculations; he is not willingly reminded of his end. But these are only passing paroxysms, which do not remain. The poet has permitted disgrace, want and honour, debasement and encouragement to aim at his moral elevation, but to use Pistol's words, he remains *semper idem*. Dead to the law of morality, he would fain also remove the law of right. Even that most superficial feeling of honour, the wish to save at least a good appearance, this, the lowest degree of a sense of shame, is wholly extinguished in him. He needs a store of good names, but he has no earnestness in procuring them. Dull and devoid of feeling, he plunders even the poor; he is scornful towards inferiors, cringing towards those whom he fears, and with so little sense of gratitude and fellowship, that he plays the calumniator behind the back of his friends and benefactors. To what measure all shame is deadened within him, is most glaringly depicted, when he hacked his sword, as an evidence of his heroic deeds, and by this baseness and by his shameless swearing, makes even a Bardolph blush. The starting point of this character is

exhibited in his soliloquy concerning honour, as every reader has felt without any analysis; Falstaff says his catechism there *in thesi*, and the noble Blunt, who has fallen a sacrifice for his king, is his actual proof as to the vanity of this thing, which is called honour. It is this very core or rather nullity of his nature, his lack of honour, which places him as a great and striking contrast to the other principal characters of the piece. As in Percy honour and manliness blend into one idea according to the notions of the age, so on the contrary in Falstaff do lack of honour and cowardice. The chivalric age saw the key-note of this character in its thrasonic boasting; and even to us, Falstaff appears in all the breadth and height of his nature, when he utters his imprecations against a coward, and reveals at the same time his own cowardice and bragging insolence. His endowments here shine forth with the most various brilliancy; his cowardice exposes him to derision, as before his size; his lies must extricate him; in this art he is short in memory, but long in practice, inventive in his bragging, shameless in his inventions, in his shamelessness undismayed, ready for evasion, shuffling, misrepresentation, and tricks. All these qualities intertwine each other in such a manner, that it is difficult to say, which are the original sources of others, which the derived; at length when his disgrace has become notorious, and his vexation instantly vanishes in his delight that the booty is safe, we come back again to the superiority of matter, to sensual pleasure, and human brutishness, as to the starting point and aim of his whole being.

It is not to be denied that the poet has bestowed all these traits upon Falstaff, (astonished as we may be in thus

gathering them together,) which certainly make him a compound of baseness. How comes it nevertheless, that we do not abhor the cowardly Jack as such, that on the contrary we find ourselves even feeling undisturbed delight in him? There are many complex causes which tend to moderate and even entirely to bribe over our moral judgment upon this character. Readily and involuntarily we mingle pleasure in the delineation of the poet with pleasure in the subject delineated. The liveliness of the picture, the abundance of the choicest wit, the unusually skilful touch in the choice of the ridiculous and comic in the mere exterior of this phenomenon, and finally the blending of the ideal with the individual, which allows us to recognize in Falstaff now a typical character, and now an actual well-known personage, all this is done with such masterly power, that it is excusable if any transfer their admiration from the work of art to the subject of it. But even the subject itself possesses that which exercises a corrupting influence upon the estimate of its moral value. Shakespeare says of Parolles in *All's Well that Ends Well*, that he is so consummate in baseness, that we take pleasure in it; that "he hath outvillained villainy so far, that the rarity redeems him". In this delight in anything complete of its kind we look upon Falstaff; if we seriously ask ourselves if the pleasure which we take in him is indeed scarcely other than that which we take in *Reineke Fuchs*: the contrast of bare naturalness which in both cases the heroes of such different poems present, compared to all that which order, custom, habit, and higher principles have sanctioned, is so complete, that the comic impression made by every striking contrast, allows no other; no moral con-

sideration to gain ground. To this one contrast which influences our judgment, is added yet another. This is the contrast between the great sensual inclinations and desires of this cynical epicurean and his small capability for enjoyment, between his paralytic old age and his affectation of youth, between the easy existence, after which his ponderous body longs, and to which this burden in itself never suffers him to attain. The preponderance of this material burden over the intellectual powers might have been brought upon Falstaff by his own fault; but we regard it as a burden, which, once bestowed, renders him, like the drunkard at his first error, almost unaccountable for succeeding sins. The picture of human frailty, weakness, and dependence upon outward things, which Falstaff presents, softens our moral rigour.

But this must not indeed be to that degree that we should prove the bluntness of Falstaff's own feelings in our estimate of his worth. Hazlitt went so far as to say, we could as little blame Falstaff's character as that of the actor who plays him; we should only consider the agreeable light in which he placed certain weaknesses, careless of the consequences, since moreover pernicious consequences did not arise! He will not forgive the Prince his treatment of Falstaff, for to the readers of poetry in the present day, he says that Falstaff appears as *the better man of the two!* This is indeed the acme of moral bluntness, into which the æsthetic critique of a man, who has, however, made many striking remarks upon Shakespeare, has unwarily erred. But the contrary view, the judgment for instance, which Nathan Drake pronounced, who drew from this character an awful and impressive lesson of morality, as great as human weakness can ever

present, this contrary view has been very rarely followed by other expositors and readers. Still less may the actors be found, comprehending this character like Hackett, who, from the report of those who saw him, and according to a record from his own pen, did not recognize in this detestable compound of vice and sensuality, any amiable or tolerable quality given him by the poet to cover his moral deformity, except a surpassingly brilliant wit and irresistible humour. And yet it is necessary to save the poet, on whose infallibility in moral things we may rely more than on his æsthetic faultlessness, from the reproach of having been guilty of the strange contradiction of letting his fat Jack become endeared to us, only to tear him mercilessly from us without reason and right. Our Romanticists have pitied Falstaff's end, and have condemned the judgment which proffers the choice of a competence of life to the reformed, and disgrace to the incorrigible; they have indeed even supposed, that Shakespeare might have written another conclusion. Even so severe a moralist as Johnson has considered Falstaff's vices contemptible rather than detestable; it seemed as if cowardice, lying, sensual gratification, baseness, robbery, ingratitude, all the crimes in the world were to be made absolvable just because they are thus accumulated in Falstaff. The pernicious consequences which just before the act of disgrace led to murder in Hostess Quickly's house, were wholly disregarded by the jealous interpreters. Falstaff's intercourse (and this was indeed a master-piece of effect) appeared not only ensnaring and alluring to the Prince, but also to the reader; the delight of seeing us well entertained, suffered not the blame of immorality to gain ground. Thus far had the

poet reached his object with us, thus far did we all feel with the Prince. But on his sentence of judgment we would no longer comprehend him. In this we fell far short of the Prince in moral severity and nobility and in the true dignity of man; far short of the Prince and of the poet, who knew very well what he did, and what he made his Henry do. This lies plainly expressed to every attentive reader in the whole course of the second part of Henry IV., only that this piece in the representations is usually blended with the first part, and much of it is omitted, as happened even in king James' time, according to a manuscript discovered in 1844; and moreover it is rarely read with the same attention as the first part; perhaps just for the reason that Falstaff here plays no longer the brilliant rôle which he does in the first part. But it almost appears as if the age had not at once found the true solution of the characters of the Prince and Falstaff, and their relation to each other, and as if the poet, therefore, in Henry V. and in the Merry Wives of Windsor, had intentionally sought opportunity to make himself thoroughly intelligible. The two pieces as well as the second part of Henry IV., have perhaps the smallest æsthetic value among all the later works of our poet, but they possess an ethical value all the more great. They continue the history of the first part of Henry IV. almost entirely with a moral aim, and they alone are sufficient to shew us, that in Shakespeare's time that law of the impure æstheticism of the romanticists and their followers, was not current, that law which emancipates poetry from morality.

HENRY IV.

PART II.

Upon the second part of Henry IV., we have but few words to say, since the political and ethical idea of the first part is here only continued, and is not replaced by a new one in a new group of characters and actions. The great characters in the first part, Glendower, Douglas, Percy, have disappeared, the king's physical constitution is broken, a mental change appears to have begun in the Prince; the space which Falstaff and his companions occupy, is wider than formerly, but it loses in attraction. The threatening of the state in the little war of these free-booters stands out all the more glaringly as the great revolt of the Percys recedes. The exertions of the great powers in the first part is followed by a universal exhaustion in the second, and only secretly is a new energy preparing itself in Prince Henry, which is subsequently developed in the following piece of Henry V. As soon as we consider the tetralogy in connection, the lower range of this third piece appears as necessary in an æsthetic as in an ethical sense.

This flagging appears first in political life, in the weak continuation and in the dishonourable end of the revolt.

Its soul had fled with Percy, whose courage had animated every peasant, whose death had now dispirited all. His father Northumberland, a cipher when left to himself, feels a paroxysm of courage at the moment of rage and sorrow, but soon allows himself to be brought back by a woman's arguments to his usual nature; instead of marching his troops, he sends a letter to the Archbishop of York, as he had before done to his son; and as with the one, so he leaves the other to destruction, and flees to Scotland. The revolt is now placed in the hands of York. It is now to be sanctioned by the varnish of religion, not fought out with valour. Such a great undertaking as the subversion of a kingdom, is to be accomplished with caution, and no longer with the wild fancies with which Percy attempted it. They build upon French assistance which Mortimer is to bring; they hope not so much from their own courage as from the king's empty coffers, and from the people's weariness of his rule. Already under Percy the hearts of the people were wanting to the cause of the revolt, but here even the hearts of the conspirators themselves are deficient. The valour of Mowbray, the son of Norfolk, in whom the old enmity of his house against Bolingbroke yet works, is here as little followed, as was Vernon's caution in Percy's councils. And among the over-wise who had examined everything and had considered everything, not even is the caution to be found at the mutual treaty for the discharge of the troops, of delaying the measure until the enemy should have accomplished it also. The shallow beginning ends foolishly, amid an awkward and disgraceful act of deception on the side of the Prince of Lancaster, who is led by the crafty Westmoreland. Among the honourable adversaries at

Shrewsbury, the presence of the king and of Prince Henry on the one side, and of Percy on the other, would have made such perfidy impossible. Lancaster has inherited all the qualities of Henry IV., which the Prince of Wales has discarded, who indeed has little love for this brother, though he acknowledges his valour at Shrewsbury. Lancaster is brave and honourable from a sense of duty, grave from propriety, prudent from precocity; the place which his brother lost in the council, he, in his extreme youth, has obtained. If we credit Falstaff, his wit, however, does not reach far; he drinks no wine, eats only fish, and can scarcely be made to laugh. The trick which he plays the rebels, savours of his father's school; in honour indeed this son with all his docility falls short of his father's policy, in the same degree as Prince Henry with his indocility exceeds it.

As thus, compared with the first part of Henry IV., the actions and characters here take a lower position, so is it also, if we turn to Falstaff and his company. The contrast of his inner development compared with that of the Prince, is the thread carried through the whole piece, the catastrophe of which is the catastrophe of their mutual relation; this lies at the close of the piece and necessitates a continuation, which is immediately announced in the epilogue. We have thus to trace the growth of this catastrophe, a task, after the termination of which, we shall require not a word further in vindication of the much attacked conclusion or of the poet himself. From an ethical point of view, this business is like the washing of gold-sand, once the muddy surface of the piece has been penetrated.

We have seen, that Falstaff at the close of the first part,

in the battle of Shrewsbury, obtained the honour of the victory over Percy, transferred to him by Prince Henry. From this renunciation of the Prince, a great rumour of Falstaff's valour spreads among all people, and he becomes a kind of mythical character; the Chief Justice, and the sheriff's officers, the women, friends, and enemies are filled with his heroic courage. The Prince has effaced his old sins, the day of the battle has annulled the accusation of his robberies, a store of good names, of which he stood in need, has been accumulated upon him without merit, the seriousness of the time summons of itself to serious concentration, and the Prince is touched to the heart by this admonition. The worthy Chief Justice encourages Falstaff expressly to make use of the good state of his reputation, that it may remain so. The poet and the truly careful friends of Falstaff have omitted nothing to keep him on the road to honour, upon which, undeservedly, chance and the sacrifice of the Prince have placed him. The king has intentionally separated him and the Prince, in order to guard against mutual misleading. They have withdrawn from him the coarse Bardolph, and have associated with him an innocent page of a nature yet sound, and not merely, as *he* supposes, to set him off by his diminutive stature, but to accustom him to more refined society. And this choice has been made with true wisdom and discretion; for the little man is in no wise of Lancaster's feminine turn of mind, he soon learns to empty his pint, he understands wit and jests and similes like one practised in them; but they are of a more refined kind than Bardolph or Peto would understand, they are even partly so deeply learned, that although they do not stand the philological examination of the commentators,

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they imposed upon the Prince himself. To all this is added, that Falstaff was associated with the severe and serious prince of Lancaster, that he may go with him to the north, while the king goes with prince Henry to Wales.

But all this makes no impression upon Falstaff's insensible nature; all that the Prince contrives for him dissatisfies him. He has already half dismissed him from his favour. He is furious over the service, he is to discharge; he tarries still in London, when the Prince has already finished his expedition to Wales. Instead of being raised by the fame of Shrewsbury, he is only more shameless and vulgar. We find him again, the vanquisher of Percy, when his credit has so fallen, that he uses Bardolph as his bail; when with a low woman, whom he means to cheat and to dupe, he fights and quarrels in the streets; when he, who has the constant inclination to boast of his chivalry, for a second time promises to wed this woman, only once again to rob the simple credulous creature of her poor property; when with secret backbiting he slanders his lord; when for all this, rebuked with a thrice repeated "fie" by the dignified Chief Justice, to whom the Prince had once respectfully yielded, he perseveres in his shamelessness, bursts forth in derision, and in secret swears destruction to the Chief Justice, which he purposes to effect on the day of Henry IV.'s death. Thus, instead of restoring his honour, he damages it yet further. The little page, instead of being able to work upon him, is soon so far influenced, that although "there is a good angel about him, the devil outbids him too". The Prince himself looks after Falstaff in disguise; he sees him ever degraded to still lower company; and before the outcasts of the people he hears, how he speaks

evil of him, his benefactor, so that even Poins demands speedy vengeance on the Prince. In his office he plays the old swindler; with cold derision he has seen his former recruits, a hundred and fifty in number, "pickled" at the battle of Shrewsbury and three only left alive; he now again selects all the good-for-nothing rabble, the able he discharges for payment; defrauded in this business by Bardolph, he again defrauds the state. Once again on the apprehension of Coleville, an undeserved honour forces itself upon him. Lancaster wishes to extol this deed, as his brother had the deeds of Shrewsbury. All in vain. He now goes to Gloucestershire, and plunders the Shallows, who think to use him and his influence at court. When the intelligence of the king's death comes, he expects the old dream of the authority of rogues to be realized. The laws of England, he boasts, are now at his commandment, every post of honour he may now dispose of at will to every simpleton and robber. In the Hostess's house, the new aspect of the period leads directly to a murder; and when the officers of justice speedily interfere, Hostess Quickly raises a lamentation that "right should thus overcome might", and wishes Falstaff back to help her with his power; and he engages also to deliver the arrested Doll. Then he meets with his glaring and well-deserved fall; justice and order regain their rights.

The scenes, in which Falstaff appears in this piece, are of so low a character, that the æsthetic and ethical deformity can only be justified by this serious conclusion. Every reader will feel, that in this part he loses much of his pleasure and interest in Falstaff, whose picture is generally drawn only from the first part. Indeed it is doubtful whether

sympathy with him would not sink too low, if Shakespeare had not used an artifice for raising him, in the same degree, in which he had fallen on the one side, by presenting fresh contrasts on the other. The poet has placed by his side new characters, whom in general value, we yet find far below him, and who cast upon him a more favourable light, just when this in our estimation becomes most necessary. There is the swaggerer Pistol, whose picture we need only see (Hogarth has drawn the actor Cibber, to whom the nickname Pistol was given, in this part,) in order at once to perceive, how human Falstaff appears by the side of this caricature. He is a bully and swaggerer by profession, while Falstaff is so only when misled by circumstance; he is a man as from another world, while Falstaff in all his weaknesses is of our own flesh and blood; he is of a false spirit and a distorted nature, while Falstaff appears sound in sense; he is a hero compared to Nym, but Falstaff is a hero compared to him; he is too shabby and abject even for a Doll, whilst Falstaff is esteemed by Hostess Quickly as an honest true-hearted man. And while the one is a mine of the most genuine wit, Pistol speaks with bombast and affectation, in pompous phrases collected from miserable tragedies, or as Nym will have it, in the unintelligible style of a conjuror. In contrast to this over-fantastic fellow stands the insipid Shallow, a braggart, a liar, and a rogue, again of another kind. How brilliantly Falstaff's ever outgushing wit appears by the side of this blockhead, who has not crammed himself like Pistol with fragments of plays learned by heart, who rather betrays his poverty of thought in the chattering repetition of indifferent words! How on the stage must Falstaff's calm yet quick eye, observing much

in a short flash, have contrasted with the unmeaning empty glance of Shallow, the cynical security of the one with the half-witted manner of the other; how prominent must have been that physical power, which drew spirit and wit from the sack, which on the contrary silenced the weak squire! Does not the false bragging of Falstaff over his latest deeds of valour, which is not without risk of betraying itself by turning upon present circumstances, inspire a kind of esteem, compared to that stereotype of the justice of the peace, who boasts of past sins, which he has never committed? Is it not just so with Falstaff's rodomontades, which are ever young and fresh, whilst the other tells certain uniform lies from habit? Is not the tattered spendthrift dearer to us, than the pedant and niggard? And is not even the official fraud of the fat knight more pardonable, than the venality of the judge? And who would grieve at last, that the loquacious, vain blockhead should fall as a sure prey into the jaws of the quick-witted Falstaff, when he indeed himself wished to abuse the knight at court for his own advantage? Thus placed in this low society, Falstaff again approaches somewhat closer to our sympathy. Among these the good Shallow is not even the lowest on the scale. In his cousin Silence, the man of untameable mirth when he is tipsy, and of asinine dulness when he is abstinent, this great fool yet possesses an admirer!

In exact contrast to Falstaff's ruin, the poet at the same time leads Prince Henry back from the path of error. We meet him on his return from Wales in company with Poins, whom he likes the best of his Ephesian friends, and who has most regard for himself. In his general humour little appears changed; he is familiar as before with his dissolute

companions, and interchanges with them his coarse and indelicate witticisms; he has still longings for small beer, as he was accustomed to drink it in this company. But here for the first time he is ashamed of this low taste, and reproaches himself for associating with Poins and his friends, and for becoming initiated into all their meanest secrets. The thought of his father's sickness and possible death has softened him; he is sad even to weeping. His heart bleeds inwardly, but intercourse with his frivolous companions has unaccustomed him to the demeanour of sorrow and sadness. Poins construes this change into hypocrisy, and looks upon his former hilarity at the prospect of the crown as his natural mood. The princely blood in Henry is roused. "Thou think'st me," he says to Poins, "as far in the devil's book, as thou and Falstaff, for obduracy and persistency: let the end try the man." He receives letters from Falstaff in the old familiar tone, but in the manner, in which he receives them, in the manner, in which he converses with Poins, a separation of feeling is perceptible. The seriousness of circumstances, the sickness of his father, the approach of the period of his high vocation, have roused him, and the resolutions of that first soliloquy, which we heard from him, begin to ripen into action. He can no longer with that irresistible humour resign himself as before to the frivolities of his old friends; he remembers his dignity at every moment between the promptings of the old vein. "We play the fools with the time," he says, "and the spirits of the wise sit in the clouds, and mock us." He inquires after Falstaff, he wishes to go in disguise to spy after him, that he may see him in his true colours; but he goes not in the old harmless way to find pleasure in him; there is an

object in his errand; "the purpose must weigh with the folly"! He finds Falstaff, as we have before intimated, entirely lost. We cannot say of the Prince, that he formerly authorized Falstaff in every thing, or that he licensed him in every thing. When he once compared his father to a singing man of Windsor, the Prince broke his head; even in the midst of the most jovial condescension he had never renounced his princely position. He now finds, that he heartlessly mocked at him in the hearing of an utterly reprobate being, how shall he longer waste his heart on him? This bare-faced back-biting had already appeared to the prince to go beyond the jest, which can only be permitted face to face. The inner estrangement is felt throughout; there is now no comedy played, when the tidings come from the court; the freely indulged mirth of the former connection is gone. The prince comes to the court at his father's end. The last suspicion rouses fully his veiled nature. This one scene, which needs no explanation, is worth the entire remaining piece. The king's apparent death cuts him to the heart, Warwick finds him sitting over the crown like a picture of mourning sorrow. The hearts even of the most unconcerned tremble with doubt as to what the kingdom may expect from him. The far-seeing Warwick had flattered the sick king, that the Prince had but studied his wild companions like a strange tongue, the most immodest word of which is learned; that in the perfectness of time he would cast off his followers. But when the perfectness of time came, he seemed to be of another opinion, and he wishes the heir to the throne had the temper of the worst of his brothers. His brothers see with astonishment Henry's deep emotion, when he appears as

king; the worthy Lord Chief Justice he holds in suspense to the very last; when with calm majesty he draws back the clouds from his bright and pure nature, and with one word sets all at rest, by promising that this very man shall be as a father to him, that *his* voice shall sound before all others in his ear, and that he will follow his wise directions. Wildness and passion have died and been buried with his father; the tide of blood, hitherto flowing in vanity, turns, and ebbs back to the sea, where it shall mingle "with the state of floods, and flow henceforth in formal majesty". The change of feeling, which had commenced with his call against the rebels, is completed at his higher vocation to occupy the English throne, and it is soon confirmed by his kingly life and his heroic deeds. Here also on the largest scale does the poet sketch the amendment of the noblest of his humourists. Upon each, upon Biron, and upon Benedick, he imposes the task of shewing in their domestic relations, their ability for meeting the seriousness of life as well as its jests. This demand the royal Henry has to satisfy in the highest business of political and military life. And here in a splendid manner he mocks the expectation of the world, frustrates prophecies, and "razes out rotten opinion, who had writ him down *after his seeming*". The character, the pieces which turn upon the development of this character, are on this point magnificent counterparts to the Merchant of Venice, and make us perceive in an extraordinary manner, how deep was the impulse, with which Shakespeare at this time reflected upon the value of human existence, upon its true and its apparent worth. In the one was represented the apparent worth of men in outward possessions, in the other the apparent worth of outward

authority and esteem; gold and outward honour, the vehicles of all *seeming*, the gods of those who cling to appearance, these are the poles, round which these pieces revolve. As Bassanio deals lightly with money, so does Henry carelessly with this outward honour; to show the different relation of different beings to possession and to honour, has been the task in each. From the unusual emphasis, extent, and depth, with which this is done, it has often been concluded, that Shakespeare may have been connected with these pieces in a manner even personal. But to this point we will return later.

HENRY V.

The history of Henry V., as we read it in the text of the folio-edition of 1623, existed before in a defective sketch, which has been preserved in three older quarto-editions, (1600. 1602. 1608.) but unfortunately in such a disfigured form, that it appears hardly possible, to conceive a correct idea of the poet's first design; it seems, therefore, venturesome and inadmissible to draw any conclusion whatever from their comparison, respecting their accurate relation to the improved piece, which will alone occupy our attention. In this last form the play appears to be written in immediate connection with the preceding histories. The epilogue to Henry IV. already announces the piece; the chorus at the close of Henry V. looks back at the conclusion of the great work of this tetralogy, to the earlier histories of Henry VI., "which oft our stage hath shown". The date of this piece is certified by the allusion of the chorus in the fifth act to the earl of Essex's military expedition to Ireland. This passage must have been written between the April and October of 1599. In outward bearing, the piece resembles the second part of Henry IV. The choruses seem to announce that here the "brightest heaven of invention" is to be ascended; yet this is reached rather in a patriotic and ethical,

than exactly in an æsthetic sense. The lack of all plot, the prose of the low scenes check the poetic flight; some of these scenes, as that between Katharine and Alice, between Pistol and Le Fer might even well be missed. Here and there the poetry in this piece rises, it must be admitted, to the most lofty expression, and this especially in the choruses. This unequal form appears here to reflect the deep nature of the subject displayed. Interpreters regarded these choruses as a means for investing the piece with an epic character, for which the simple battle-material seemed to them more adapted. But these choruses are maintained in a bold, ardent, figurative diction, utterly opposed to the epic; Shakespeare rather employs this more elevated poetry, to place the hero of his poem in the splendid heroic light, in which from his unassuming nature he cannot place himself, and in which, when arrived at the height of his fame, he expressly wishes not to be seen by those around him. Garrick felt very justly that in representation, these choruses ought not only not to be omitted, but that they must be placed most prominently forward; he spoke them himself.

The whole interest of our piece is in the development of the ethical character of the hero. After the poet has drawn out before us his careless youthful life in the first part of Henry IV., and has shewn in the second part, how at the approach of the period of self-dependence, the sting of reflection and consideration pierced his soul, he now displays, when Henry is arrived at the post of his vocation, how the king acts up to his resolutions for the future. At the very beginning of the piece, we are at once informed of the utter change which has passed over him. The sinful nature is driven out of him by consideration, the current of

reformation has suddenly scoured away the old faults; as the wholesome strawberry ripens best, "neighbour'd by fruit of baser quality", so his active practice, his intercourse with lower life and simple nature, has matured in him all those gifts, which etiquette and court-ceremony would never have produced in him, and which those now around him perceive in him with admiration. The poet expressly tells us through the prelates, who discuss the king in the first scene, that there are no miracles, either in his poetry or the world, and that we must seek the natural grounds for this wonderful change, just in the unpromising school of this apparently untutored man. There this many-sidedness was developed, which now astonishes them in him, and on account of which he now appears equally acquainted with all things ecclesiastical and secular, in the cabinet as in the field. He no longer squanders his now valuable time, but weighs it to the last grain; the curb of mildness and mercy is now placed on his passions, and even foreign lands conjecture, that

"his vanities fore-spent
Were but the outside of the Roman Brutus,
Covering discretion with a coat of folly".

And *how* justly that systematic wickedness was calculated, how entirely according to his design the unexpected sunshine broke through the veil of clouds, is excellently expressed in the scene, where the king first meets us again, discussing with his counsellors the important business of the wars with France. The force and courage of men, the success and the favour of Providence, is manifest in every word of this discussion. "When once the mind", says Bacon, "has placed before it noble aims, it is immediately

surrounded not only by the virtues, but by the gods!" Every one yet fresh in his gladly disappointed expectation, appears as if electrified. The thought of honour prevails in every breast. All classes are equally devoted to him in heroic unity; his family, his uncle and brothers, with the nobles urge him to the war; the clergy give him the mightiest sum, that they had ever granted to an English king; they depict to him the heroic age of the Edwards, and call him to renew their feats; all breathes courage and good will. As if seized with a better spirit, even Bardolph, Nym, and Pistol seem to settle their quarrels among themselves, that as sworn brothers they may march against France. The Eumenides of the insurrection, who had disturbed and crossed the rule of Henry IV., are heard retreating in the distance. The Irish who had rebelled against Richard II., the Welsh and Scotch with whom Henry IV. had to fight, appear together as countrymen in the king's army. The treachery of some bribed nobles lies easily frustrated at the feet of the king. The words of the dying Henry IV. are fulfilled, that the crown seemed in him merely as "an honour snatched with boisterous hand", and the quarrel which grew from this, was the argument of which his reign had been the scene. His death "changed the mode". The young king follows the home-policy, which his father had in dying commended to him; he leads those "overproud with sap and blood" into foreign war, and turns their thoughts to new and greater things.

This policy urges Henry to the French war; he is urged to it by right and the well-grounded claim of which with religious conscientiousness he is convinced; he is urged to it by his ambition, which bids him compensate for his youth

and its idleness by great deeds. His history, thus he desires, shall speak with full mouth freely of his acts, or else his grave "shall have a tongueless mouth, not worship'd with a waxen epitaph". The scorn of the enemy and the mocking taunt at his madly-spent youth excites his passion for the righteous war, which he has undertaken with firm resolution, and this passion he gives vent to in an ambition equally scornful: — he never valued "this poor seat of England", but when he rouses himself in his throne of France, for which he has laid by his majesty, he will "rise there with so full a glory, that he will dazzle all the eyes of France". It is in this war, that he acknowledges himself the most offending soul alive, if it be a sin to covet honour; for now has he the great object before him, as we said before, in behalf of which it must seem to him noble to be roused. Now in his fight at Agincourt he has it before him even to surpass the warlike Edwards, when with a little, weak, famished band, he has to withstand the brilliant force of the French, at least five-fold more in number. And in this position he aspires truly after the wholly undiminished glory of a position thus desperate; he would not lose so much honour, as one man more would share from him, who came to his assistance from England.

In these expressions, somewhat of that strained nature may seem to lie, which we pointed out in Percy as opposed to Henry; and truly we see the king in this over-strained condition, throughout the whole war. This would be a contradiction in his character, if anything were a contradiction in it; but we showed throughout, that it belongs to his nature and essence to be everything when occasion calls him and necessity claims him. We found him indolent

and idle amid the degeneracy of a corrupt period of peace, now he is in the war, now he is a soldier, now he appears in word and deed collected and eager, mighty and violent, acquainted with the terrible ravages of war, and with unrestrained passions, ready even, at the right moment to unbridle them himself. In peace, he says himself, nothing so becomes a man, as modest stillness and humility, but in war he must imitate the action of the tiger, stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood, and disguise fair nature with hard-favoured rage. Just so, influenced less by principle, than after his fashion by time and place, the king appears at first with resolute decision towards the French ambassador; then he sends back defiance and contempt to the scornful Dauphin, then the French embassy announce him as coming "in thunder, and in earthquake, like a Jove", and thus we see him before Harfleur, threatening the citizens with all the terrors of a besieged town. Once had *Prince* Henry said, that he was "not yet of Percy's mind"; but now the *King* is so. Just so would Percy's impatient spirit have chafed before a besieged city; just so would Percy have broken out with boasting before the scornful French ambassadors, as Henry does, infected by the soil of the boastful nation; just so did Vernon's words provoke Percy at Shrewsbury, as the Dauphin's message now does the prince; and still at his subsequent wooing of Katharine, he is as entirely the soldier, as far from quibbling rhetoric, and as free from all arts of verse and dancing, as Percy ever could have appeared. Now the world compares him, as the poet once had done Percy, to Cæsar and to Alexander. Now he appears wrathful as the war-god, regardless and terrible, when in the battle of Agincourt furious at the plunder and slaughter

committed by the flying French, he commands the death of the prisoners. Now his ambition also, like Percy's, imperceptibly passes into a thirst for honour, which, when in hasty impatience it desires to obtain an object, weighs not means and ways.

But that which at once obliterates all these similarities to Percy, is the contrast of circumstances which at once draw out in him those opposite qualities, which Percy could not have possessed. Left to himself and unprovoked, the braggart is all humility; in the pauses of rest, the warlike tiger is peaceful and tame. He calls himself a man like every other, whose affections are indeed higher mounted, yet, when they stoop, they stoop with the like wing. Percy's affections did not so. Never would he have been seen, least of all as king, in that condescension, in which Henry appears in his present position, never in the moment of serious preparation for hot strife in the tranquil repose which Henry manifested. In his courtship and on the day of battle Henry is just as plain a king, as if he had "sold his farm to buy his crown". He has shaken off his old dissolute companions, but the remembrances of that simple intercourse are recalled to our mind at every moment. The same inclination to rove about with the common man in his host, the old mildness and familiarity, the same love for an innocent jest, exist in him now as then, without derogating in the least from his kingly dignity. He leaves his nobles waiting in his tent, while he visits the posts of his soldiers; the old habit of night-watching is of use to him now; he sounds the disposition of individuals; he encourages them without high-sounding words; he fortifies them without ostentation, he can preach to them and solve moral scruples and is intel-

ligible to them; he contrives a trick quite of the old kind in the moment of most gloomy suspense; like a brother, he borrows his cloak from the old Erpingham; familiarly he hinders not his countryman Fluellen from joining confidently in his conversation with the herald, and in his short appeal before the battle, he declares all to be his brothers, who on this Crispin's day shed their blood with him.

This contrast between his repose and calmness and his martial excitement, between his plain homely nature and the kingly heroic spirit, which in the moment of action exercises dominion over him, is, however, not the only one, in which the poet has exhibited him. The night before, and the day during the battle, which form the centre of our piece, is a period so prominent, and in which such manifold moods, emotions, and passions are roused and crossed, that here the best opportunity was afforded to the poet for developing before our eyes this many-sided man, in all the richness and the diversity of his nature. When the mind is quickened, he himself says, "the organs break up their drowsy grave, and newly move with casted slough and fresh legerity": thus is it with him in this great and decisive moment. We see him in a short time alternate between the most different emotions and positions, ever the same master over himself, or we may better say, over the opportunity and the matter of the moment which lies before him. The French herald comes and challenges him to ransom himself from his unavoidable detention; he returns a proud bragging declaration; he repents it while he is speaking. He is seized with a moment of passion, as in that collision with the Chief Justice, but at once he is again master of himself; nor was he so forgetful even in the moment of

excitement, as in any way to neglect the truthfulness of his nature; imprudently he conceals not from the enemy the critical condition of his little army. At night, well knowing the danger of his position, we find him in the most serious mood; he will have no other company, he and his bosom will debate a while. This debating is disturbed by contact with all sorts of people belonging to his camp. He hears the scorn of the boaster, he listens to the voice of the pedantic lover of discipline, he talks with the apprehensive, who are better and braver than their words. That truth so incapable of dissimulation speaks in him even here. What had it cost him, to boast of the king in the name of a third person, that he was cheerful and full of trust? But he does it not; he will extinguish in the soldiers as little as in himself the consciousness of danger, that he may spur them by the necessity to their utmost exertion. When he remarks this anxious expectation, he assures them of only that which is true: that the king himself would not wish to be anywhere, but where he is. The question occupies the serious natures, whether they must answer with their souls for the possible injustice of the royal cause they fight for, or whether the king, if they die for him unprepared, will have to answer for their sins? He turns field-preacher and explains to them; he falls into a quarrel on the matter with the coarse Williams; he takes up the jest as well as the edifying conversation, though the acting out of the matter is to be disturbed by the bloody seriousness of the battle. After the unexpected interruption, and its half-constrained humorous turn, the king sinks all the more completely into solemn deliberation with himself; meditation and seriousness overtake and overburden his soul. When they

have just laid their cares and burdens to the king's charge, how naturally does this same king's train of thought follow, that he who had known the happiness of poverty, should recall it to his mind at this hour, when ceremony, the prerogative of kings, from which he was ever escaping, must appear so empty to him. He, he says in the deepest self-consciousness of his real sterling value, he is a king, who has found out this ceremony and its importance! How enviously (standing before the last pinnacle of his fame, as his father had done before in the moment of sickness and distress), how enviously he looks upon the healthful occupation of the peasant, who rises with the sun, sweats in its beams, and all night sleeps in Elysium, — and how affecting and striking is it, how completely in the spirit of this king by merit, that in sight of this happy toil of the poor, returning to his former idea, he sees the vocation of the king in this, that he, conscious and vigilant, with *his own* labour and exertions, establishes that security of the state and that peace, which the poor man enjoys in unconscious happiness. To this meditation upon the ideas thus excited, there follows that perfect collectedness of the king's mind in that fervent prayer, in which he prays God, not to-day to think upon his father's fault. Then he rides forth to see the order of the battle. And as he meets his nobles and hears Westmoreland's wish, to have here "one ten thousand of those men in England that do no work", he shows how seriously he means to gain for himself out of this very necessity, the highest prize of honour without further help. How popular after his old fashion, and at the same time how sublime, is his encouragement to the battle! How calm his last words to the French herald! How far is he

from being over-hasty in giving credit to the victory! When he now hears of the touching death of the noble York, how near is he to tears! and at the same moment, alarmed by a new tumult, how steeled to a bloody command! how impatiently furious at the last resistance! and at the moment when victory decides for him, how pious and how humble! And again a short time after this solemn exaltation, he concludes his joke with Williams, careful even then that no harm should result from it. The poet has continued in the 5th act to shew us to the very last the many-sided nature of the king. The terrible warrior is transformed into the merry bridegroom, the humourous vein again rises within him; yet he is not so in love with his happiness, or so happy in his love, that in the midst of his wooing and amid jest and repartee, he would relax the smallest article of the peace, which his policy had designed.

But how? Has not the poet forgotten that grand feature in Henry's character, that profound modesty, which formerly, as if wilfully, veiled all his brilliant qualities? Is it only expressed in the serious mood before the battle, which is however natural even in the coarse, quarrelsome Williams, in a similar position? Or was there no occasion to display this former characteristic of the Prince, which appeared to us the very marrow of his virtue? Or did he cast it off for this once at this noble provocation for the exertion of all his powers? We saw him at the battle of Shrewsbury voluntarily yield one glorious deed to his inglorious friend; but here he has fought a battle, the whole glory of which falls on him alone, which the poet with full design has visibly cast upon him alone, since he keeps the heroic forms of Bedford, Salisbury, and York, so completely in the

back-ground. What turn does his modesty take, if it remains the same, to avoid after its fashion this glaring light of fame? The answer is this: it deepens in the same degree as his fame becomes more exalted, it becomes humility, and gives the honour to God. This sentence will shock many of Shakespeare's worshippers, who have seen in him nothing but æsthetic and moral free-thinking, and a man of disorderly and wild genius. But to our mind, the truth of the sentence and the truth of the delineation of the character can be disputed equally little. Throughout the whole piece, throughout the whole bearing of the king, sounds the key-note of a religious composure, of a severe conscientiousness, and of a humble modesty. The chronicle itself, which extols Henry so highly, that it placed him before the poet as a historical favourite, praises the king's piety at home, and at every page in his campaign: Shakespeare has accepted this historical hint in no mechanical manner, but has wrought it appropriately into the characteristics of his hero. The clergy at the very beginning of the piece call him a true friend of the church, and have reason to rejoice over his respect for it, as well as over his knowledge of sacred things. When he is occupied with the plan of war, he charges the archbishop of Canterbury with a solemn oath to take heed in his counsel; he "will believe in heart", that what he speaks as to his right to this war, is in his "conscience washed, as pure as sin with baptism". When he has no thought but France, those to God alone "run before" his business. He receives it as a promising ordinance from God, that the treason, lurking in his way, is brought to light. He delivers his puissance into God's hand, putting it straight in expedition; God before,

he says several times, he will come to take his right. He orders his old friend Bardolph to be pitilessly executed for robbing a church; he wishes all such offenders to be cut off; for he well knows that when "lenity and cruelty play for a kingdom, the gentler gamester is the soonest winner." We have seen him previous to the battle in such solemn preparation, and in such edifying conversation with his soldiers. His first word on the certainty of the victory is — "Praised be God, and not our strength, for it!" When he reviews the greatness of the victory, he says again: "Take it, God, for it is only thine!" And that this is in earnest, he orders even death to be proclaimed to any, who may boast of it, or take the honour from God. At his triumphal entry into London, he forbids the sword and helm, the trophies of his warlike deeds, to be borne before him, and the poet says expressly of him in the prologue, what once the Prince said of himself on that day at Shrewsbury over Percy's body: that he was free from vanity and self-glorious pride, giving his trophies and signals from himself to God. The atonement, which his father could not attain to, for want of energetic, persevering, inward stimulus, is accomplished by him. In his prayer to God before the battle, when he wishes that the sense of reckoning may be taken from his soldiers, and that his father's fault may not be remembered, he declares, that he has interred anew Richard's body, has wept over it, has atoned with masses, that he has five hundred poor in yearly pay, who twice a day hold up their withered hands toward heaven for him. The poet, we see plainly, adheres to the character of the age and invests Henry with all that outward work of repentance, which in that day was considered

necessary for the expiation of a crime. To many he will appear to have gone too far in this, both for his hero, who is otherwise of so unshackled a mind, and for himself, who in this respects rises so far above the narrow views of his own, to say nothing of older times. But above this objection also, the poet soars victoriously in those excellent words, which he puts into the mouth of the king at the close of that penitential prayer :

“ More will I do :
Though all, that I can do, is nothing worth ;
Since that my penitence comes after all,
Imploring pardon?”

Shakespeare has in no wise attributed to the king this pious humility and fear of God as an occasional quality, upon which he places no more value, than upon any other ; we see from the repeated reference to it, we see from the nature of the character and its necessary bearing under given circumstances, we see from the plan of the whole piece, that this trait is intended to form the very central point of the whole. The poet works with the same idea, in which Æschylus wrote his warlike pieces, the Persians and the Seven before Thebes : that terrible is the warrior who fears God, and that on the other hand the blossom of pride ripens into the fruit of evil and the harvest of tears. For entirely in this sense has Shakespeare placed the camp of the French and their princes, in Xerxes-like arrogance and crime, in opposition to the little troop of Britons and their intrepid pious hero. Such arrogance is exhibited in their dividing the lion's skin before the hunt ; in the French king wishing to bring the English Prince in a chariot captive to Rouen ; in the Dauphin, jeering at his youthful tricks,

sending a tun of tennis-balls to the man, who ponders with such anxious conscientiousness his articles of war; in their playing at dice before-hand for the low-rated English; in their bribing the English nobles with money to murder their king. Shakespeare's age designated that impious reliance on human power by the name of *security*, and this bold confidence in their number and the proud contempt of the enemy is imputed by the poet to the French camp. With arrogant desire they long for the day, which the English await in suspense and doubt; they spend the night in noise and din, which the English pass waking in uneasy calmness, and in edifying preparation; they sparkle with shining weapons and they boast of splendid steeds, while the beggarly host of the Britons go in war-worn coats and ride famished horses; they look down with haughty boasting on the heads so heavily armed yet devoid of intellectual armour, and compare their fool-hardy courage to that of their mastiffs, while the English, as if the king had imparted his soul to all of them, calm in their anxiety, gather rather fresh courage from necessity, self-respect, and fidelity. Among the French leaders there is hardly one, who does not vie with another in empty boasting and bragging, not one, who does not share the childish delight in dress and military decoration, not one, whom the seriousness of things can draw away from insipid witticisms and vain debates, not one, who showed even a tinge of the seriousness, of the calm courage and devotion of the English. But among them the Dauphin surpasses all in this shallow self-complacency, in this frivolous arrogance, in this merry bragging from natural narrowness of capacity. These scenes, if it were only from the mixture of broken French,

border on the caricature; Shakespeare here, if anywhere, has fallen too easily into a weakness of the age. It is to me more than probable, that a jealous patriotic feeling actuated our poet in the entire representation of his Prince Henry: the intention, namely, of exhibiting by the side of his brilliant contemporary Henry IV. of France, a Henry upon the English throne equal to him in greatness and originality; the greatness of his hero, however, would appear still more estimable, if his enemies were depicted as less inestimable. It alone belonged to the ancients, to honour even their enemies. Homer knows no depreciation of the Trojans, and Æschylus no trace of contempt of the Persians, even when he delineates their impiety, and rebukes it. In this there lies a large-hearted equality of estimation and nobility of mind, far surpassing in practical morality many subtle christian theories of brotherly love. That Shakespeare distorts the French antagonists and could not even get rid of his Virgil-taught hatred against the Greeks, is one of the few traits, which we would rather not see in his works; it is a national narrow-mindedness, with which the Briton gained ground over the man. The nations of antiquity, who bore a far stronger stamp of nationality, than any modern people, were strangers to this intolerant national pride; even the Romans were so; on their triumphal arches they fashioned the statues of captive barbarian monarchs, noble in outward form, and showing in their whole bearing all the hostile defiance of independence.

Shakespeare has in this piece also, brought the popular king Henry into closer contact with the people; his society is now however wholly different to that of his youth. At that time extravagance and idleness, thieving and loitering,

were placed by his side, in order to make the contrast more sensible of his own only occasional participation in the wantonness of the others; now the poet has found it necessary to present a wholly different contrast, which is to render evident to us, that his new moral severity and religious character rests not on the mechanism of an ecclesiastical habit, that the free-spirited youth has not possibly become an old devotee. The downright contrast of such a religious bigot, Shakespeare could not dare to exhibit; the religious spirit and puritanical strictness of the age did not permit it; the whole English stage of the period never ventured, to my knowledge, upon tracing a character even slightly tinged with religious bigotry. Shakespeare therefore has rather exhibited by the side of the king, such austerity and conscientiousness in a worldly aspect, grown into a habit, respectable but not too accountable, that we may at once feel the contrast to the unshackled mind of his hero, in whom religious fervour, like each of his qualities, was developed according to the nature of circumstances; in whom it became apparent before, over the body of Percý, at the tidings of his father's sickness, and as early as at that first soliloquy upon the crown; in whom it now blazes forth more brightly on the great occasion of a war between two mighty states, at an undertaking in which the boldest is reminded of his dependence on external powers. Among the more serious popular characters, along with the steady, worthy Gower, the rough Williams, and the dry Bates, the Welshman Fluellen, the king's countryman, is the central point. He is, as the king himself says, a man of much care and valour, but out of fashion; compared with the former companions of the Prince, he is like discipline opposed to licence, like pedantry to dissolute-

ness, like conscientiousness to impiety, learning to rudeness, temperance to intoxication, veiled bravery to concealed cowardice. Contrasted with those boasters, he appears at first a "collier" who pockets every affront. In common with his royal countryman he is not what he seems. Behind little caprices and awkward peculiarities is hidden an honest, brave nature, which should be exhibited by the actor, as it was by Hippisley in Garrick's time, without playfulness or caricature. Open and true, he suffers himself to be deceived for a time by Pistol's bragging, then he seems coldly to submit to insult from him, but he makes him smart for it thoroughly after the battle, and then gives him a groat to heal his broken pate. He thus settles the business, on which Henry sets him against Williams and which brings him a blow, and when the king rewards Williams with a glove full of crowns, he will not be behind in generosity, and gives him a shilling. He speaks good and bad of his superiors, ever according to truth, deeply convinced of the importance of his praise and blame, but he would do his duty under each. He is talkative in the wrong place, takes the word from the lips of others and is indignant when it is taken from him, but in the night before the battle he knows how to keep himself quiet and calm, for nothing surpasses to him the discipline of the Roman wars, in which this is enjoined. The cold man flashes forth warmly like the king, when the French commit the act so contrary to the law of arms, of killing the soldiers' boys. At the time of his respect for Pistol, the latter begs him to intercede for the church-robber Bardolph, but he made his appeal to the wrong man. It is a matter of discipline, in which Fluellen is inexorable. Indeed he especially esteems his

countryman king for this, that he freed himself of these old companions. This is the essential to him in his learned comparison between Henry V. and Alexander the Great, that the latter killed his friends in his intoxication, while the former turned away his, when he was in his right wits. Since then his countryman is inscribed in his honest scrupulous heart, before he had certainly made little of the dissolute fellow; now he cares not who knows, that he is the king's countryman, he needs not to be ashamed of him "so long, as his majesty is an honest man". "Happy it is that the noble Henry can utter a cordial amen to this remark: God keep me so"; his captain Fluellen would at once renounce his friendship, if he learned from him his first dishonourable trick. The self-contentedness of an integrity, unshaken indeed, but also never exposed to any temptation, is excellently designed in all the features of this character.

The pedantic-like discipline and love of order, the valour by line and level of the brave Fluellen, if it appears in old-fashioned light compared with the well-based and free virtue of the king, stands out on the other hand by its very unassuming nature, in advantageous contrast to the worthlessness of his boasting companions Pistol, Nym, and Bardolph. The poet allows us through them to have another glimpse of the early intercourse of the Prince. At the commencement of the important period they appear a little elevated, but circumstances again ruin them. Their seducer Falstaff is no longer with them, a better spirit accompanies them in the boy, whom we venture to take for the Page in the second part of Henry IV., and who honourably falls in battle with the boys. He characterizes his three companions whom he thought of leaving, so distinctly, that we require no other

analysis. They are soon again sworn brothers in filching, and Bardolph and Nym bring themselves to the gallows. As a proof that Shakespeare has not made the king act inconsiderately to Falstaff, (who in the chronicle also appears as a strict lover of justice) he makes him say expressly at Bardolph's fall, that he will have all such offenders so cut off. Pistol is not so bold a thief as they, and he is, therefore, dismissed with the more lenient lesson from Fluellen, who makes him eat his welsh leek, and cudgels his honour from his limbs. The poet did not again introduce the fat Falstaff, we hear only of his death. After the epilogue to Henry IV. it was without doubt Shakespeare's intention, to let him appear in this piece also. During the work itself he must have discovered, that this was no longer practicable. He must have exhibited him in ever greater debasement, and this would have destroyed the symmetry and the great design of the piece. The poet, however, by this omission, remained in debt, as it were, to the public, and he seized therefore an opportunity not long afterwards, of liquidating it in another manner, by writing the Merry Wives of Windsor, in which he once more, in strict ethical development of the characters, makes "plump Jack" appear as the principal figure.

KING JOHN.

King John is mentioned in Meres' well known list of Shakespeare's plays in 1598, and thus appeared *previous* to that year, as Delius conjectures between the completion of the York and the beginning of the Lancaster tetralogy, not long before 1596. Little place, as in Richard II., is given to the prose, and in one passage rhyme has maintained its ground; play upon words and conceits in unsuitable places are even more frequent here than in Richard II., a piece to which King John appears to be almost contemporary, if it were only on account of the great family-resemblance between the character of Constance and that of Richard II.

There is an old piece *Kynge John* by Bishop Bale, which at the latest was written at the commencement of the reign of Elizabeth; but it was not only unknown to Shakespeare, but also to the author of the older two-sectioned dramatic history of King John, out of which Shakespeare produced his work. This older piece exists in many impressions, the first of which is dated 1591, and the third, of 1611, bears from speculation the name of Shakespeare falsely on the title-page. Shakespeare entirely followed this older work in the historical matter, and there is scarcely more than one

passage to be pointed out with certainty, from which it may be concluded that he consulted the chronicles besides. Artistically considered, he took in the outward design of the piece, blended both parts into one, adhered to the leading features of the characters, and finished them with finer touches; more freely, and now indeed more completely as himself, he did that with this preparatory work, which he had before done more timidly with the two last parts of Henry VI. To compare the older King John with Shakespeare's is a task, which far more rewards the trouble, than the comparison of Henry VI. with its original, because here the maturer poet revised a work at least as good. The older King John is a rough but not a bad piece, from which the poet could have borrowed many happy, poetical, and historical features. It possesses the old stiffness and is intermingled with Latin passages, according to the earlier custom, yet it is freer from the extravagances of the old school, from which these historical subjects in a great measure rescued us. The diffuseness in the second part is heavy, and here Shakespeare with excellent tact has remedied the evil by abridging. The characters are designed in a manner suitable for our poet, but are far less sustained than his. For the mere sake of speaking, speeches are given to Faulconbridge, which are inconsistent with his nature. Arthur, who speaks once in the childlike tone of his age, loses it again, and in the pathetic scene with Hubert is a precocious disputant. How far Shakespeare excelled his best contemporary poets in fine feeling, is evidenced by this older piece, if it be compared with his revised work. Shakespeare delineates his Faulconbridge (and himself in him) rigidly and bitterly enough as a good

Protestant in the base treatment of popish arrogance. In suitable passages he gives full play to the indignation of the English at popish rule and intrigue, encroachment and oppression, which at that time was readily listened to in London. But he did not go so far as to make a farce of Faulconbridge's extortions from the clergy; the old piece offered him here a scene, in which merry nuns and brothers burst forth from the opened coffers of the "hoarding abbots", a scene certainly very amusing to the fresh protestant feelings of the time, — but to our poet with his impartial mind, the dignity of the clergy, nay indeed the contemplativeness of cloister-life, was something too sacred for him to introduce it in a ridiculous form into the seriousness of history. There are many similar crudenesses in the old piece, which Shakespeare has likewise effaced. At the marriage-treaty between Lewis and Blanche, the poor Constance is present; at the indelicate discussion (Act I. sc. 1.) between the brothers Faulconbridge, their mother is introduced; the illegitimate son subsequently threatens his own mother with death, if she does not confess the truth to him: this lack of tenderness does not occur in Shakespeare. In another respect also the accurate comparison of the two works is of the greatest interest, if we would watch Shakespeare's depth in the treatment of his poetry, as it were, in the work and in the creation itself. In many passages of the old piece, where motives, delineation of character, and actions, lay before him in ample prolixity, he has gathered the contents of whole scenes compactly into a single sentence, a single insinuation; he disdains a superabundant perspicuity, and leaves to the actor, the spectator, the reader, somewhat for his own mind to find out and to add. If we interpret as

much out of such scanty hints as all penetrating commentators of Shakespeare feel themselves obliged to do, we pave the way for an impression of unwarranted imputations of greater wisdom and fulness, than that of which the poet thought. But these comparisons prove to us too plainly, that we can never go too far in truly fathoming this poet, that far rather we have to labour to find out what lies concealed in him; and that we have only to guard ourselves from interpolating his sentiments with philosophical maxims and reflections, which were foreign and remote to him as well as to his age.

King John has outwardly no reference to the two historical tetralogies which we have previously discussed; but with regard to the thought it contains, we shall see the poet in this piece also, working with the same political views, which distinguish the circle of ideas in the histories from that of the exact dramas. If we turn away from the historical subject, we might pronounce this piece to be a tragedy of the purest water, simply representing the idea of so many of the ancient tragedies: that "there is no sure foundation set in blood; no certain life achieved by others' death". But to this general idea the purport of the whole piece does not pervadingly refer. A rich web of political actions aiming at one central point, circles round Arthur's death, which forms indeed the main turning-point of John's fortune, but it is in no wise the sole cause of this reverse of fortune, any more than the guilt of the king alone is so; but from these political actions is developed, as in Richard II., an idea at once political and ethical, of the more special character of the leading thoughts of all Shakespeare's real and strict histories.

The political actions, which we intend, turn upon the

disputed throne of England. After the death of Richard Cœur-de-lion, in virtue of a testament of this king, at the instigation of the queen-mother Elinor, the rightful heir of England, the young Arthur of Bretagne, is excluded from the throne, and Richard's brother John becomes his successor. The old Elinor, an offence to morality, as Constance upbraids her in our own piece and as history exhibits her, an Ate, as the play names her, who in the reign of her husband, Henry II., stirred up the sons against their father, as she now did the dying Richard against the lawful heir, this Elinor is the political genius and guide of her son John. His succession serves her ambition and her hatred of Arthur's mother, Constance, who, according to Elinor's declaration, sought on her side the throne for her son only with the ambitious design of ruling herself and kindling all the world. Constance and her adherents call John a base usurper; John at first in opposition to his mother seems to trust his right as much as his strong possession; but his mother whispers in his ear as a secret, that his throne rests more on strong possession than on right. The testament of the former king which she has procured, as well as its judicial validity, rests as the dubious point between the indubitable right of Arthur* and the usurpation of John. On his side is the actual possession, on Arthur's and

* The following genealogical table makes the relation plain: Henry II. (Elinor, separated from Lewis VII. of France.)

Henry † 1183.	Richard Cœur- de-Lion. † 1199.	Geoffrey of Bre- tagne(Constance).	King John.	Eleanor. (Al- fonso of Castile).
Bastard Philip Faulconbridge.		Arthur.		Henry III. Blanche.

his mother's the armed assistance of an apparently generous friend, the king of France. We will see, which way fate inclines in this well-balanced strife, how fortune ebbs and flows, how combinations and political intrigues intersect each other, and which way the poet steers amid all these vicissitudes and intricacies. First of all we must become acquainted with the principal characters, which stand opposed to each other on both sides.

Throughout this piece Shakespeare has softened for the better the traits of the principal political characters, and has much obliterated the bad; his John, his Constance, his Arthur, his Philip Augustus, even his Elinor, are better people, than they are found in history. The ground of this treatment, which is commonly not peculiar to him, is not merely this, that in this instance he did not draw directly from the sources of the chronicle; there is also the design in it, which will be explained in what follows, that the vehicles of the political story should be merely men of ordinary stamp, who derive the motives for their actions from no deep-lying passions, men neither of a very noble nor of a very ignoble sort, but, as it is wont to be in the political world, men who act from selfishness and common interest. The base previous history of Elinor and Constance is touched upon partly only in cursory insinuations, and partly not at all; the older, active Arthur of history is transformed into an inactive innocent boy; King John himself is kept much in the back-ground, even *his* historical character is softened and refined by Shakespeare. As he appears at the commencement, he is like a vigorous man prepared for everything, resolved with a strong hand to defend his possession of the throne against every assault. He is, as

Faulconbridge subsequently, referring to this early period, reminds him, "great in thought"; in the thought, he means, of maintaining with all his power against every pretension the English land, which actually is on his side and has sworn allegiance to him, and of identifying the kingdom with his fatherland, as the straight-forward Bastard ever does. He is not the image of a brutal tyrant, but only the type of the hard manly nature, without any of the enamel of finer feelings, without any other motives for action than those of the instinct of this same inflexible nature and of personal interest. Severe and earnest, an enemy to cheerfulness and merry laughter, conversant with dark thoughts, of a restless, excited spirit, he quickly rises to daring resolves; he is uncommunicative to his best advisers, laconic and reserved; he did not agree to the good design of his evil mother, that he should satisfy Constance and her claims by an accommodation; better does it please his warlike manly pride to bear arms against the threatened arms; in his campaigns against Constance and her allies, the enemy himself feels that the hot haste, managed with so much foresight, and the wise order in so wild a cause, are unexampled. Thus lord of his presence, and allied to the great interest of the country, he appears feared, but not loved and in favour, and he presents in truth no amiable side. No child-like reverence draws him to his mother, but her political wisdom; no vein of kindred to Faulconbridge, but his usefulness; to Hubert he speaks of love, when he needs him, and of abhorrence, after his services have proved injurious; the property of the church loses its sanctity for him in necessity; — but this manner of consulting only his immediate advantage in all circumstances, leads him by

degrees so far as to betray the great possession of the state in another time of need to this same despised and crushed church, whose arrogant interference he had before withstood with scornful defiance. A higher principle sustains not the man and his energetic designs in time of danger, the great idea at his outset leaves him during the progress and at the end of his career. After his power, as he displays it against France, has risen even to the defiance of the Pope and the church, and to the inconsiderate design upon the life of a child, whose temper was not to be feared and by him had not been even tried, it sinks down, struck by conscience, by curses, and by prophecies, by dangers without and within; he becomes anxious, mistrustful, superstitious, fearful to absolute weakness and to a degree of faint-heartedness, in which he sells his fatherland as cheaply, as once in his self-confidence, he had held it dearly and had defended it boldly.

In contrast to the entirely political relation between the usurper and his mother, is the entirely maternal relation of Constance to her son Arthur, on whose side is the legitimate claim. The suspicious Elinor sees in him a bloom which may ripen into mighty fruit; Shakespeare too has given a profound mental capacity to the pure and spotless mind of the tender boy; in that scene with Hubert which affects the soul of the spectator with such agitating emotions of fear and pity, it is not alone his loving nature which disarms cruelty, it is also a persuasive spirit full of wise, even of cunning precaution, which terror at once ripens into a saving power. Yet at the time no pretender would have been less to be feared than he. He would that he were low laid in his grave, when he hears the contention over his right. He would gladly be a shepherd, so that he might be merry,

and be free from the unmerited fault of being his father's son and heir. But all the more firmly does his ambitious mother cling to the legitimate claim of the child, who knows of no ambition. She has called France to arms for her fair son, whom she loves with all the intensity of maternal pride; she would be less ambitious for herself and him, if nature had not made him so worthy of command. She herself is yet beautiful as a matron, she pleases herself, it appears, not a little in the beauty of her child, and to argue from the impression, which she makes on the bystanders, her charms must even in her extreme and utterly unfeigned sorrow enhance the spectacle of her grief. Ambition spurred by maternal love, maternal love goaded by ambition and womanly vanity, these form the distinguishing features of this character, features out of which from the adversity of fate, that raging passion is developed, which at last shatters the soul and body of the frail woman. She is a woman, not to say *the* woman, whose weakness amounts to grandeur, and whose virtues sink into weakness; she is, like John in his masculine sphere, without those mental and moral resources, which could make her moderate in prosperity or calm in adversity. To the daring man, misfortune is the stone against which he stumbles, to the passionate woman, it would have been success. From the transporting violence of her love and of her grief we may conclude, how violent she could have been in hatred and arrogance. Her coarse outbursts against Elinor, her contemptuous and sarcastic outbreaks against the Duke of Austria, when she stands on the doubtful ground between success and misfortune, testify to the sanguine, womanly, even womanish, want of self-command, which makes her

irritable at fear, and would make her irritable at haughtiness. Her biting speech is even too bitter for her child, and too immoderate for her friends. Shakespeare has depicted in her the female counterpart to Richard II., who imperious in prosperity, was speedily lost in adversity. Powerless to forward their own cause, the one from early self-abandonment, the other from the outward grounds of her position and sex, both alike powerless in active defence and revenge, they both sink into the exaggeration of a passion, which rages within the man in smouldering heat, within the woman in a brightly blazing fire, an exaggeration of the mind and the fancy, which manifests itself in the most brilliant outpourings of eloquence and reflection, in the invectives of rage as well as in the outbursts of sorrow. Just as in Richard, there gushes forth in Constance a deeply poetic vein in all her misery, and like him her imagination revels in her grief, which she calls so great, that "no supporter but the huge firm earth can hold it up". Like Richard, she delights in picturing to herself dark images of death and its desired horrors, like him she plays with her sorrow in witty words and similes. Like him, her pride and majesty rise with misfortune. On the throne and state of her grief, she feels herself more exalted than her false royal friends; and in the extreme of hopelessness she is seized with the frenzy, which only threatened Richard. As the end, the ruin, the agony of king John has ever been regarded as one of the most satisfactory themes for English actors, such as Garrick, so from Mrs. Cibber to Mrs. Siddons and later, the part of Constance has been esteemed as one of the most acceptable tasks. The change of mood and the oscillations from the highest pitch of excited bitterness to the softest

depth of maternal tenderness, offer infinite scope to the artist. In the third act we must compare the Shakespearian play with the similar scenes in the older King John, to estimate thoroughly, what he has here accomplished. How the whole frail, trembling frame of the woman is agitated at the first tidings of her forlorn condition! What variety of feeling is expressed and felt in those twenty lines, in which she enquires anxiously after the truth of that which shocks her to hear! How her grief as long as she is alone, restrains itself in calmer anguish, in the vestibule of despair! How her sorrow first bursts forth in the presence of others in powerless revenge, rising even to a curse which brings no blessing to herself, and how atoningly behind all this unwomanly rage lies the foil of maternal love! How justly measured throughout is the light and the shade! We should be moved with too violent a pity for this love, leaning as it does on the one dear object, which is snatched away from it, if it did not weaken our interest by its want of moderation; we should turn away from the violence of the woman, if the strength of her maternal affection did not irresistibly enchain us.

These two opponents, unstable and unprincipled as we find them, the one without judgment, dependent on doubtful allies, the other on the wisdom of his relatives, entangle themselves in conformity with this their nature amid the alternations of fortune in a series of unnatural confederacies, where weakness and mistrust in a cause not wholly pure, seek support, and interest strives to counteract interest. John alone appears at the outset master over himself and his country, and hence, firm, quick, and successful; Constance on the contrary is in an unpatriotic league with the

natural enemy of England, with France, and in a yet more equivocal friendship with the Duke of Austria*, who, according to the story of the older King John, was the cause of the death of Richard Cœur-de-Lion, the brother-in-law of Constance. The poet has not expressly pointed out the unnaturalness of this union in a national and domestic point of view, because the passionate woman, a stranger to all political considerations, falls into these errors with the same inconsiderateness as Richard II. does; but the insincerity and weakness of this alliance betrays itself the more strongly in the manner, in which the violent-natured woman bursts forth with scornful hatred against Austria, after he has become faithless. The poet's opinion moreover upon every English league with France, is taught in *King Lear* with such severe consistency, it is in this piece subsequently taught so forcibly in a second instance, that he could spare himself the lesson on this first occasion. And he did this here all the better, because this alliance, seen from the position of France and Austria, has a second side, which stands out all the more distinctly. Both fought, as it appears in the beginning, for the good right of an innocent orphan, as the knightly defenders of a weak woman; Austria moreover fought in expiation of the death of Richard, a strife at once just and pious; they derive their authority from the highest Judge, and with better right than John could call themselves the servants of God. The double-sided nature of this alliance is exactly counterbalanced by

* In this character Shakespeare has blended into one person, as in the older King John, Duke Leopold of Austria, who kept Richard in prison in 1193, and Count Vidomar of Limoges, before whose castle at Chalus, Richard fell in 1199.

John's equivocal right; this the poet has shewn at its head in the equal, indecisive battle, and in the position of the town of Angiers between both pretenders. Now, however, the neutral inhabitants of Angiers interfere with the idea, that France should give his son and John his niece in marriage, and that peace should thus be concluded. With no other motive than the consciousness of his weak right, John adopts these conditions upon the counsel of his mother; had he at first consented to treat with Constance, he could easily have satisfied her with the investiture of the English possessions on the French territory, which he now — surrenders to France! To stop Arthur's title to the whole, he gives a part of England's territory away to England's worst enemy! And the king of France moreover, whom Christian love and zeal at first urged to a war, which even Faulconbridge declares "resolved and honourable", forsakes the right of the widow and orphan, and turns it "to his own vantage". But this fair-seeming peace, which John enters into with the perjured, is not to last a single day. That great power, which ever with masterly hand has sought worldly and political advantage in the name of God, interferes between the new-allied, the Pope calls the king to account for spurning the church, and upon his defiant reply, pronounces excommunication against him and the dissolution of the league. The Dauphin draws away the French king from England in spite of his scruples at "playing fast and loose with faith" and "jesting with heaven", while he impresses upon him the inequality of the gain and loss, on the one side the curse of Rome, on the other the light loss of England's friendship. The poor Blanche falls a sacrifice to political considerations, and their preponderance over

those of home and heart. John, imprudent once in resting on false supports, is so now in the wicked removal of weak enemies, and in the dangerous provocation of strong opposition. He contrives the murder of the harmless Arthur, and irritates the already disturbed church by fresh extortions. The legate Pandulph, a master of Machiavellian policy, watches these errors, and builds upon them the new unhallowed league between France and Rome; with cold blood he speculates, how Arthur's death may be occasioned by a French invasion, and this again may be advanced by the sensation produced by the murder. "A sceptre", he tells the inexperienced Dauphin,

"snatched with an unruly hand,
Must be as boisterously maintained as gained:
And he, that stands upon a slippery place,
Makes nice of no vile hold to stay him up".

The anticipated murder of Arthur, the plunder of the church, would breed discontent in England; from this "hurly", the old student of this "old world" teaches France to draw advantage. This practical prophecy is fulfilled: the country becomes unruly; the king's evil conscience is roused; suspiciously he has himself crowned a second time, and this makes his nobles suspicious also. The murder of Arthur comes to their hearing, they revolt from the king. A new anti-national league is formed between the English vassals on the one side and France and the Pope on the other, and the French dauphin prepares on his part a treacherous death for the traitors to England. Meanwhile the fearful and perplexed John loses his old courage and confidence so far, that he takes his land as a fief from the Pope, and enters into a shameful treaty of subjection to the most virulent of his

enemies. The older piece regards this treaty only as a cunning act of dissimulation, but Shakespeare has no longer imputed such a characteristic to the ruined king, but only to the strong, inflexible Faulconbridge. The king has forgotten his former vigour, which the enemy has now learned from him; he turns his hardened zeal against poor prophets, only to benumb his superstitious fear; his energy is gone. The unnaturalness of all these complicated alliances is now speedily manifested; the league between England and the Papacy, that between the Papacy and France, that between France and the English vassals, all are suddenly broken up, without the attainment of the object of one of them; they change throughout into the natural enmity, which severed interests necessitate.

Amid these errors and intricacies, these inclinations and aversions, these alliances and quarrels, self-interest and advantage, the ruler of all political affairs, bears sway. Faulconbridge solemnly rebukes this, in the first league between John and France, in Philip's breach of faith to Constance, as the author of this double godless course of action, as "that broker, that still breaks the pate of faith"; as "that daily break-vow; he that wins of all"; that cheats all; as

"the bias of the world,
The world, who of itself is peised well,
Made to run even, upon even ground;
Till this advantage, this vile drawing bias,
Makes it take head from all indifferency,
From all direction, purpose, course, intent".

To this power, to this lever in every commotion, high and low abandon themselves more or less readily. King John and Constance are urged by the force of direct

nature, by want of principle, by lack of moral and patriotic sense, to grasp at its offers; the French princes follow its dictates with a deliberation, which overcomes the counter-balance of honour; the duke of Austria stands ever cowardly close to the strong and marches with them; the papal legate is the master, who thinks to take this moving-power in his hand and to guide after his own intention. In what relation to the errors and seductions of this power and to its confused world of policy, do those men stand, in whom the fire of morality and of genuine patriotism is not quite extinguished? Shakespeare has placed this contrast of a better humanity in opposition to those slaves of interest, in four gradations.

The young Arthur is in his unspotted innocence quite a stranger to this world of guilt and selfishness. In this strife of hostile powers, only the discord of quarrel meets his ear, and even that is intolerable to the saintly creature. The superiority of a nature angelic, untried, and uninjured, drives the tender being early from the noisy world, for which he has neither understanding nor heart; it is as if he would remove from his keeper Hubert the temptation to an evil deed, while in full consciousness he incurs the danger of the suicide, which proves fatal. It happens repeatedly in Shakespeare's plays, that childlike innocence meets in this manner with a tragic fate: it is so with the sons of Edward in Richard III., with Macduff's bold and heroic boy, with Mamillius in the Winter's Tale, and here with Arthur. Shakespeare has always painted this innocence in the most charming colours; he has not cast the lightest mote across the moral spotlessness of these characters, he has indeed on each occasion added the interest of intellectual

endowments to them; all these youthful beings are premature in their development and precocious in their minds. How is the pitiable destruction of these creatures consistent with the demands of that poetic justice, which lay so near to the heart of the poet? They could not perish in moral justice; how could we impute guilt to childlike innocence and make retribution, when no deeds are committed? Nevertheless, in the historical piece of Richard III., for example, the death of Edward's sons was imposed upon the poet in his subject; he could not evade it. What did he do, to reconcile feeling and fancy with the cruel destiny? He yielded to the pious popular belief, which says, that God takes to himself most early the sweetest children, and to that other, so often expressly repeated in Richard, that children "so wise so young, do ne'er live long". He delineated these guiltless souls in such angelic perfection, that they appear too good for this lower world, so that with sorrow and pity for their end, a feeling of happiness is mingled, at seeing them withdrawn from the rough contingencies of life. And this poet appeared to Voltaire an intoxicated savage!

It is best for the pure innocent nature to be withdrawn from the confusion of the political world, — this is a doctrine, which even the master of policy, Machiavelli, has taught. But not everyone is in the position to be withdrawn from it by the force of destiny, or to be able voluntarily to avoid it. A moral nature and a duty national and political are at variance in the noble Salisbury, and create for him a struggle of soul, which leads to false steps, if such they can be considered; the right line of action in such political perplexities is expressly

represented as one so delicate, as not even to be always accurately discovered by the most just sense of morality. When the treachery of France towards Constance and Arthur is committed, Salisbury appears as a man of sensitive feeling, whom this misdeed pierces to the heart; he looks with pity on the wronged Prince and restrains not his tears. When the death of Arthur reaches his ears, he separates himself quickly with other vassals from the king's cause; he will not line the "thin bestained cloak" of the king with his own pure honour. When they stand altogether before Arthur's corpse, the outburst of his moral abhorrence of this murderous deed makes even the Bastard dumb. He forbids his soul obedience to this bloody man, the smell of sin stifles him, he vows revenge of the murdered, and enters into league with France, the enemy of England. The sensitiveness of his moral feelings seduces him to a deed, which in a national and political sense is a crime; but the noble man does it not without a heavy struggle between necessity and honourable motives; the tempest of soul, the great affections, wrestling in his bosom, break forth in "an earthquake of nobility", and he withdraws to weep the shame of his enforced choice of stepping on the soil of his country in the ranks of her enemies. Scarcely is he subsequently informed, that the unnatural league with the national enemy threatens him with death at the hands of this same French Dauphin, who had bestowed on him such high-sounding words of admiration, than he "untreads the steps of damned flight", and now leaves his irregular course, to return to obedience to the king and his country's cause.

The great Vassal sees himself from his mere social position obliged to act from *political* consideration, — the

smaller servant of the king, Hubert, appears only in a *personal* relation to the king; Salisbury sees himself in a bitter struggle between duty to his country, and the impulse of a deeply excited abhorrence resting on moral principles; Hubert's struggle only consists between habitual service and a half-wakened sense of conscience, which never before had been called forth. The unthinking man true to his feudal oath, instigated by his king in a spoken hint to the murder, and in written command to the blinding of Arthur, this man follows the course of habit in blind obedience, till the sight of Arthur and his supplications awaken in him his slumbering better nature. He seeks to approach the dull but not wholly inaccessible conscience of the king, that he may effect the rescinding of the command, or find excuse for his disobedience. He feels not the sharp goad of moral consciousness, which at once separated Salisbury, on account of this murder, from his fidelity to the king. He revolts not from the king, as the other did, from the higher impulse of obedience to the divine law; he preserves himself from a breach with his country, but the stain of the suspicion cleaves to him, for which the revolted vassals threaten him with death. It is very skilful, how afterwards the Count Melun betrays the treacherous designs of the Dauphin against these English Vassals, partly on account of his English descent, partly, and this touch Shakespeare added to the older piece, *for love of Hubert*. This reflects a respect for the man, whom they had too readily condemned, who now becomes their preserver on the side of his nobler nature, in the same measure as before, from the plot against Arthur which the king, building upon his rough exterior, committed to him, he had become an accessory to his death.

The gentle Arthur perished in the political struggles, in which he was placed; the manly Salisbury was misled in his political path by the delicacy of his moral feeling, the rougher Hubert erred in his higher moral duty from his faithful zeal; the Bastard Faulconbridge is carried through all these disturbances by his upright patriotic spirit, his sound understanding, and an acute moral instinct of not too tender a texture. The poet makes him not only look steadily at the pole-star, which can alone lead in these intricacies of political life, but he has also designed in his character that kind of nature, which is the most qualified for this unerring steering through a stormy and dangerous sea. The Bastard Faulconbridge among Shakespeare's humorous characters, is one in which the poet does not separate the spirit of seriousness and mirth as in most of the others, giving to the latter usually the preponderance, but he exhibits them both in a close and well-balanced combination. His mode of expression throughout even in the most elevated, most solemn passages, bears the manner of the uncommon, striking expression of a sceptic, habituated to wit and bitter sarcasm. But as he is placed by fate at the very outset in the busy political world, occupation and work leave him no time to indulge this merry vein, and his deep seriousness in action counterbalances his idle inclination to trifle and to jest. His course through the tragic events, offering so little food to comic humour, is the very reverse to that of king John. The latter begins with power and kingly thoughts and ends in weakness, the Bastard bounds light of heart into the wider sphere that opens before him, and advances continually in seriousness and strength even to a tragic greatness. In his first soliloquy

he looks jestingly upon his new dignity; his merriment is changed to bitter irony in the second soliloquy (Act II. sc. 2.) after the sad experience of the French breach of faith with Constance; in the third soliloquy, from the gloomy course of events, he rises to most serious reflection; and at last, ever increasing in power and personal importance, he wholly assumes the direction of the great concerns of the state, and concludes with the tragic resolve, which Shakespeare, in an antique grandeur of sentiment, has imputed to all his faithful servants, to Horatio and to Kent, as well as here to Philip, to follow his deceased king. The metal, out of which this character is moulded, is of a similar masculine character, as in John. The older piece furnished the die for the character, Shakespeare fashioned it into a true work of art. Even there he is depicted as a bold mad-cap, rude and daring; he is a wild intrepid warrior, whose defiance amounts to proud boasting, he has a straightforward, hearty sense for nature, he is coarse-grained in understanding, and in morals, a contrast to the crafty, considerate diplomatist, to the faithless wrangler, to all custom and conventionality, a bastard to the time which is regulated by such arts, as he is a bastard by birth. Shakespeare in this character also, is occupied with the idea of show and reality, of genuine nature, propriety, and prejudice. Faulconbridge is in the rare position of being permitted, as it were, to choose between a legitimate birth from an indifferent father, or an illegitimate one from the famous Cœur-de-Lion. This first introduction at once develops his character, which clings rather to substantial honour than to conventional form. He is more proud of a descent shameful in the eyes of the world, from a great and famous

father, than of an honourable legitimate descent from an insignificant father; he prefers a full-face from the mighty hero, than a "half-face" like his brother from lawful birth. His domestic position bears a resemblance to the historical circumstances of king John. He is the eldest son and heir of his alleged father, but the younger brother charges him with illegitimacy, and thus threatens his inheritance. The Bastard would fain preserve his property and the honour of his mother, he would also fain have so glorious a king for his father. His sound feeling decides in favour of devotion towards so noble a father and such an hereditary honour, which promises to call him to still higher honour, and he *rejects* legitimacy of birth, his mother's honour, inheritance, possession, and interest. He flatters himself that he is, what John also calls himself, "lord of his presence", and that he may thank his merits for his success, as John might have done, had he continued as noble-minded in his kingly calling as at the outset. The coarse moral of the Bastard, which he utters like a catechism, suits both equally: "What though?" he says,

"Something about, a little from the right,
 In at the window, or else o'er the hatch:
 Who dares not stir by day, must walk by night;
 And have is have, however men do catch:
 Near or far off, well won is still well shot;
 And I am I, howe'er I was begot".

It is suitable to this worldly, unamiable, but respect-compelling man, so far removed from a subtile morality, but still more inaccessible to all dishonour, that the poet only makes him occasionally think of being religious; that he imputes an excessive reverence for the church to him as

little as to John, that he twice gladly and successfully executes the king's command to lay the clergy under contribution, and to shake their bags; that he upholds the defiance of his prince towards the Pope, only with a more contemptuous opposition, in a time of misfortune and danger, while John only ventures upon it in prosperity. If we would personify the English national character, if we would sketch the idea of John Bull according to the then existing condition of the popular civilization and life, we should say that in the plain, blunt, unpretending Faulconbridge, in this simple straight-forwardness of sound common sense, of hearty ability and natural cheerfulness and wit, the traits of the national English character are gathered together as we should expect in a tragedy of this purport, in which this representative of the people is assigned the task of deciding for the popular welfare in the critical political transactions, in which the bad are ruined and the good confounded.

Let us follow in conclusion this genuine son of England on his way through the rugged intricacies of that policy, into the midst of which he finds himself drawn, by his original union with the king. In the first place he is pleasing himself with his knightly dignity, with his new rank, which will never become him; the genuine sons of the age and their manners, which he must now adopt, are as repugnant to him as his feeble brother; but he means to familiarize himself with this poison, not for the sake of practising to deceive, but to avoid deceit. He then follows the course of the war until John's league with France, which deprives England of a part of her possessions, and Constance of the help of France. Neutral himself, he utters here the judg-

ment of unerring uprightnes, against this "mad composition", in which John divides his property and France defiles her honour. His soliloquy at the close of the second act, (Shakespeare's addition entirely), severely points out the god of this world, that selfishness which ties and unties these knots; he himself will worship him, for he sees that all bow before the idol. But at the time that he gave his land to his brother for unsubstantial honour, he too well proved that he was not made for this idol-worship. The old piece makes Faulconbridge in this scene in love with Blanche; Shakespeare judiciously omitted this trait, that the Bastard's judgment, which should guide us in all these matters, might not in any way be injured by personal interest; his fierce attack upon Austria, in the spirit of the enemy Constance, is thus the wholly pure expression of honourable disgust at unnatural alliances, aye, of joy at their interruption, and of design in their dissolution. The time comes, when the vassals of John revolt on account of Arthur's death. He stands agitated over the bloody and condemned deed; but he is cautious of conceding the point to the Barons before he receives full explanation. He will not provoke them still more to defection from their country, a step which he would not even justify, if the murder were proved. For this reason he turns upon Hubert all the condemnation of his judgment, if he has done the deed; he believes the voice of honour when Hubert denies it. His fidelity to the king goes too far for him to break it, like Salisbury, for the sake of an unproved accusation; but never would it have gone to such a point as Hubert's, silently and obediently to receive a command or a hint, like that of the murder of Arthur. But the intricacies of the matter are felt by this man,

formerly so sure of his path, no less than by the others; he fears to lose his way among the thorns and dangers of this world; he calls him happy, "whose cloak and cincture can hold out this tempest"; he sees that on no side is honour and blessing to be gained. He shows at once on the next occurrence, how little he, the king's most faithful servant, is the king's flatterer. He conceals not from him his political blame upon his disgraceful alliance with Rome; it seems insufferable to the patriot, that weapons of offence should be met with good words and compromises, that a "cockered silken wanton" like the Dauphin should "flesh his spirit in a warlike soil"! He recalls the king's old intrepidity and confidence, and vicariously assumes these qualities, when he sees them lost in the king. It is not the king but he, who now watchful, "towers like an eagle over his aiery, to souse annoyance that comes near his nest". He hastens, as much as lies in him, to destroy the league between his king and the Pope, as he had before interrupted the peace between him and France; at the same time he calls the rebel nobles to duty and to shame, "the Neroes, ripping up the womb of their dear mother England". And thus his exhortation to them, when they have returned in repentance, is that they should "push" destruction and perpetual shame, out of the weak door of the fainting land. So long as the king's command is not at variance with the divine command, he identifies throughout the king with the country. The king's evil star begins to shine, when he sins against his country in the French contract of marriage; he meets with his tragic fall at the instigation of the church, when he was betraying his country to this very church; and just so can no blessing rest on Constance's claim to the throne, when she is in

league with the enemy of the land. The king's crime against his country thus falls upon his own head; but the king's crime, such is Faulconbridge's opinion, is not to be expiated by his country. He, therefore, holds to him through thick and thin; "something about, a little from the right" are the same to him; the preservation and strength of the land is more to him than the lawful right to the crown, which he sees in Arthur; many thousand cares he sees at hand in the vast confusion; but the greatest to him, is that heaven itself frowns upon the land. In this position he acts according to that maxim of Bacon: "God takes care of the world, take thou care of thy country." For its safety he stretches every nerve, and most of all when he sees the king most fallen. The feeling for his country binds him to the king, when the sense of law and morality loosens Salisbury from him; each of them knows that he is only halfway on the right path; the Bastard execrates the murder and curses the subjection to Rome, Salisbury weeps manly tears over the necessity for a state-crime, by which he would save his country. The moral finer-feeling man commits the greater political error, the greater politician takes the side less morally pure, but in perfect firmness of conviction that in such conflicts, the country and its independence and preservation, is the only way-mark to follow, that for patriots the foundation of all virtue is persistent steadfastness, which in the service of the fatherland can invest even moral transgression with a nobility. He discovered selfishness, interest, and advantage, to be the star which governs the political world; if it be so, then as a last resort, the advantage of the country should be that before which all others are to be silent. Therefore in the opinion of the poet

as well as of Faulconbridge, no foreign policy and no hostile sword should heal domestic wounds. Hearty unity with a natural enemy is of no value to him, and the national discontent at the league with foreign propaganda, whether it be even against tyranny and arbitrariness at home, is to him a sight full of ignominy and dishonour. A lesson grandly inculcated upon us Germans, for whom there will be no state, politics, common nationality, and public welfare, until, endeavouring to act up to it, we understand how to apply to ourselves, the conclusion of this piece, which is at the same time the soul of it:

“This England never did, (nor never shall,
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror,
But when it first did help to wound itself.
Now these her princes are come home again,
Come the three corners of the world in arms,
And we shall shock them: nought shall make us rue,
If England to itself do rest but true”.

III. COMEDIES.

The four comedies in which Shakespeare rises to a higher degree of refinement and elegance than in his earlier ones, in which his wit and mirth sparkle most brightly, in which the fewest serious scenes occur which might disturb the comic key-note, these comedies lie close together between the second and third periods of his poetry. The *Merry Wives of Windsor* was written according to the epilogue to *Henry IV.*, after that piece (1598), and before 1602, when it first appeared in print. *As you Like it*, is not mentioned in the Meres' list of Shakespeare's pieces in 1598; and must, therefore, fall between this year and 1600, when it is named in a notice of the bookseller's register of the 4th August. *Much Ado about Nothing* is noticed at the same time in the records of the booksellers' company, and *What you Will*, according to the concurrent opinion of almost all editors, likewise belongs to the year 1600 or 1601. Following closely upon this merry group, *Measure for Measure*, written somewhat later about 1603, has indeed the air of a more serious drama, and thus may lead us in an unbiassed transition to the tragedies of the third period. In the four comedies prose decidedly predominates, more so than in

other plays of our poet, which, from the date of their origin, lie remote from this group; this prose diction, so masterly in Shakespeare's pen, adds extraordinarily to the freedom of the dialogue and to the versatility of the wit.

At the boundary line, at which we leave this series of the Shakespearian comedies with the last named drama, *Measure for Measure* (which more than any other play of the poet combines the nature of comedy and tragedy), we feel ourselves involuntarily challenged to cast a glance of enquiry upon the various dramatic styles; how they were formed under Shakespeare's hands, and whether with respect to their distinction, a law may be deduced from his own practice, and what this law may be. From this consideration there results indeed an æsthetic theory as full of simplicity as of profound thought, which can at the same time introduce us to the ethical theory, to the main view of the poet upon the moral nature of man. Both theories are so extraordinarily plain, the practical part of art and life is so much at the root of both, that we must say, they rest, if not exclusively, yet far more on pure intention and healthful instinct than on abstract reflection. Man's feeling of his value and vocation was considered by Shakespeare as the true ground and soil, in which all human virtues and crimes have their root. Where it is developed in pure, noble self-reliance, as in *Henry Monmouth*, *Portia*, or in *Leonatus Posthumus* in *Cymbeline*, who through trials and waverings attain that beautiful medium between over-strained and enervated feeling, between freedom and coercion, between natural unbridledness and weakness of will, between jest and earnest, there Shakespeare sees the character and nature of man at its height, and phenomena of this kind,

he represents in an even serious tone, in those dramas which we call *Schauspiele*, dramas which have the serious turn of the tragedy and the cheerful conclusion of the comedy. Where that self-reliance rises into egotism, ambition, love of fame, into those powerful passions which exceed all bounds and come to an unhappy end, then for the poetic representation, the *tragedy* appears, in which the poet with wisely balanced admiration and caution, points out to us the greatness and the danger of this over-weening nature. When on the other hand, man's self-reliance sinks into self-love, vanity, and conceit, when the passions shrink into littleness, and the trivialness of the aims are at variance with the importance of the effort, then the *comedy* makes its appearance, as the style that nature herself indicates; a style in which the poet strikes with unimpeachable justice at the littlenesses and ridiculousnesses of this contracted humanity, at their caprices, faults, and weaknesses, which he does with a good-nature, gentleness, and forbearance, testifying to his sparing consideration of the frailty of human nature, and doing the more honour to the poet, the more severe throughout is his view of the moral duty of man.

It is not difficult to trace back Shakespeare's truly tragic characters and their motives for action almost everywhere to the one fundamental principle of egotism, and the comic ones to that of self-love; the varieties and shades of these qualities form the diversity in this general harmony. With regard to comedy, with which we shall have next to do, we have already had occasion to see it, and shall find it throughout occupied with exposing self-love, its self-deceptions and its attempts to deceive others, with unveiling

the discrepancy between real and feigned character, with unmasking vanity in fancied gifts, and conceit of vain ones. Setting aside the pieces of the first period, in the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, the prominent self-love of Proteus is the central point of action. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, self-love is manifested in the self-pleasing vain desire of fame shown by the Navarrese lords and their caricatured associates. In *All's Well that Ends Well*, the deeper trait of proud self-sufficiency in Bertram has at once interfered with the comic character. In the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, we shall see, that the harmless side of Falstaff's egotism, his conceit of his person, is the ground of the laughable occurrences. More delicate and more complicated is the nature of the three purer comedies, which next lie before us for consideration. In *As you Like it*, the comedy only glances reprovingly upon the maidenly pride of Phœbe and the self-love which suffers ship-wreck in the surfeited Jaques; the character of the principal persons is exactly opposed to all self-love; the little merry plot, therefore, is unfolded only with a pleasant humour, which claims for the piece rather the name of a pastoral, than of a comedy. In *Much Ado about Nothing*, Claudio's sensitiveness upon honour is grounded on self-love, and by this his changeable humour is nurtured; it produces in Benedick and Beatrice that contempt of the other sex, and that fickle abandonment of their own principle, which is the fruit of this exaggerated pride. In *What you Will* above all, we shall perceive most clearly, how in the most different degrees, in its coarsest and finest features, self-love forms the soul of the prominent characters, and how deeply it is interwoven with the main idea of the piece. For throughout, (this is apparent already from the hints we

have given beforehand respecting the last-named pieces, as it was to us from former analyses,) that distinguishing feature of the real comic characters in Shakespeare's comedies, is interwoven with a special ethical situation, varied and fashioned according to the idea, which, in spite of the most intentional removal of all didactic reflections, penetrates and connects the comedies of the poet, just as much as the tragedies.

It might be considered unnatural, that in the free action of his comedies, Shakespeare should throughout have worked in accordance with such a leading idea fixed beforehand. But whenever we speak of the leading ideas of Shakespeare's plays, we have never meant, that the poet in any of his works has given motion to an abstract idea, over which with systematic calculation and deliberation he has thrown a poetic form. The poet had gone through great inward experiences, concerning which he had taken counsel with himself; he read narratives in poems, plays, and romances, or he observed in the history of the past and present, events and circumstances, which spoke to him, and were full of life for him, because he possessed in himself, in his nature, or in his life, something corresponding which enlightened them to him; such impressions received and experienced, working all the more actively from both methods of conception, he seized for his dramas, and rounded them into an artistic form. And in this occupation, it must be admitted, he possessed in a wonderfully happy combination, the gift of making every part of his poem bear reference to one principal aspect of the given subject, and of forming every character into a distinct relation to it, without however allowing the regulating hand in the

machinery of his works, to be more seen than was consistent with the poetic illusion. This principal aspect is never of an abstract philosophical, but always rather of a moral, psychological nature. Before the luminous mind of the poet, no narrative or fiction, which was adapted for dramatic handling, could be brought, without his discovering in the circumstances and beings, out of which the action arose, certain conditions, under supposition of which alone such an action were possible or probable. To comprehend these conditions, to trace them if possible to one main condition, to a given disposition or formation of character in the actors, and at the same time to remove as much as possible all accident, this it is essentially, which gives that spiritual unity to Shakespeare's plays, which we endeavour to point out, and which, however, nowhere in the least detracts from their lively diversity, or their plastic and artistic representation. It is to be shown, that Shakespeare in single sources for his comedies met with such glaring moralization, that, as his own *Touchstone* said, he must have "broken his shins" against it; in such cases he let the moral lecture rest, but to the moral idea he adhered closely, and more closely than his sources he formed his characters according to the one fundamental feature of the nature, which could alone produce these or those actions in these or those beings. He who in this way, with a sense of truth, and with a knowledge of human nature, understands how to search for the substance of any given action or story, will necessarily always light upon such a moral, psychological kernel, as we find in all the Shakespearian works. His contemporaries comprehended this well with the mind, but not with the heart; they understood not how to make a

right use of a right rule. Nevertheless the æsthetic nature of the time knew no otherwise, than that the aim of every drama, even of every comedy, was to join some moral contemplation to the pastime and amusement, by which the weary minds of the spectators were to be refreshed, and the anxious and heavy-hearted would be relieved. Thomas Heywood was even of opinion, that the introduction of lovers and fools into comedies was intended to ridicule foolish love and to cure the simplicity and perversity of men. In this dry manner, Shakespeare's plays never and nowhere moralize. They evolve a given action, around this they group beings of such a nature as may be necessary to this action, they give to these acting characters motives, which are the qualifications for such an action; and only by the estimation and appreciation of these motives is the moral spirit of the poet himself to be perceived.

A closer consideration of our comedies will explain these propositions to us in the most delicate exemplifications.

THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR.

We place foremost in our group the Merry Wives of Windsor, although it is scarcely the earliest in the series, because the piece is connected with the Lancastrian tetralogy. Halliwell indeed, when he had the oldest edition of the Merry Wives (in 4to of 1602) printed in the writings of the Shakespeare society, endeavoured to place the origin of Henry IV. and so also that of this comedy at 1592 or 93, because in the former year a German Duke was in Windsor, to whom free post-horses were promised through a pass of Lord Howard's, an event, to which allusion might appear to be made in Act IV. sc. 3. of our piece. Nevertheless this incident may have passed before Shakespeare's mind from some earlier remembrance, it may even have been utterly unknown to him, and the apparent allusion may be mere chance. All interior reasons are against the supposition, that the Merry Wives originated earlier than the close of the Lancastrian histories (1599). The form, in which we read the piece at the present day according to the text of the folio-edition of 1623, was apparently not borne by it in its first and more imperfect design, which seems preserved in the first quarto-edition. Much of

inaccuracies of the text of this sketch indisputably falls to the charge of the illegal edition, but the carelessness of its composition seems rather occasioned by a hasty preparation of the piece, of whose improvised origin we possess information only of a later date.

In the year 1702, the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, which were much liked in Charles II.'s time, were remodelled by John Dennis into a piece: "the Comical Gallant". In his dedication he says, that Shakespeare's play was written at the desire of the queen Elizabeth and in the short time indeed of fourteen days. Rowe added to this tradition the circumstance, that her desire had been to see Falstaff in love. This tradition has in it somewhat so credible, that even the severest of the English critics do not venture to disregard it. In *favour* of its correctness may be alleged, that among all the pieces of Shakespeare's riper period, this is by far the least important. It is designed without any deeper back-ground, and without all merit of idea, without all pathetic elevation, without serious passages; it is almost entirely written in prose; it is the only piece of the poet's, in which the plot decidedly outweighs the characterization, the only one, which moves in the stratum of plain, common, and homely society. *Against* the tradition it may be alleged, that the piece appears to be written with the stated object of being a counterpart to *Henry V.*, in evident continuation of the contrast in the moral development of Falstaff and Henry, which the poet had already begun in the second part of *Henry IV.* This is the view, in which we would exclusively discuss this comedy, which in other respects, however well suited to the stage and full of comic power as it may be, offers but little matter for our mode

of examination. If the task were really imposed by the queen upon Shakespeare, the play is only a new proof, how fruitful he was in expedients, how little satisfied he was with such a superficial theme, how he was capable of giving it a deeper moral bearing and of linking it most closely with his independent works and with the ethical idea, which had actuated him in them.

If the *Merry Wives of Windsor* stand in close relation to the pieces in which Falstaff appeared, it is necessary first of all to establish the point at which this comedy stands, not exactly in the series of the other pieces, but in the order of their contents. Halliwell thinks it natural, that the incidents it contains took place after Falstaff's banishment from court. To this a passage in the older edition is opposed, in which Falstaff exclaims, under Herne's oak: I wager, the wild Prince of Wales steals his father's deer. But even in the last revised edition, master Brook speaks most plainly to Falstaff of his great connections and of his consideration both as to rank and person; and Falstaff himself says, that if his transformation into the fat witch Gillian of Brentford, (a well-known character in the literature of the 16th century) should come to the ear of the court, they would melt him out of his fat and liquor fishermen's boots with him, that they would whip him with their fine wits, till he were as crest-fallen as a dried pear. The connection with the Prince must, therefore, be considered as still existing; though Falstaff is separated from him as in the second part of *Henry IV.* If we assume that the period of our comedy is placed immediately before the death of Henry IV., and carries on the scenes between Falstaff and Shallow only in

another place and under new circumstances, the difficulties are all solved, as soon as we shall have removed the doubts respecting certain characters. Whether Falstaff's page is the same as the one who in Henry IV. is about him, and in Henry V. belongs to Pistol and Nym, is uncertain; we are inclined to take it so; the poet would naturally not unnecessarily multiply the express relations of this comedy to the utterly different historical pieces, nor presuppose an acquaintance with the characters. That Shakespeare gave the name Quickly to Dr. Caius' servant, as well as to the Hostess in Henry IV., is strange; that he intended another character in her, is clear. Not only are her outward circumstances quite different, not only is she at first quite unknown to Falstaff, but her character also is essentially diverse; similar in natural simplicity, it is true, but at the same time docile and skilful, as the silly deceived wife and widow in Eastcheap never appears. Concerning Falstaff himself all is evident. The campaign in the north is over; Falstaff drags on his existence with difficulty at ten pounds a week, Pistol and Nym are off duty and are complete thieves, Falstaff discards them and hands over the "withered serving man" Bardolph, with whom he had lived so long, to be tapster to the Host of the Garter. The outward dissolution of the merry company round Prince Henry took place in the second part of Henry IV.; here we meet with a further, and very significant symptom, that it dissolves also inwardly, and that not merely with the Prince. In the young Fenton we become acquainted with a new former companion of both the Prince and Poins; he woos the rich Anne Page for money, but he soon discovers inward treasures in her which quite transform him; he is the

counterpart in private life to the metamorphosis of the Prince himself.

From this observation we proceed at once to the central point and main character of our piece. We have seen in the second part of Henry IV., how strictly and decidedly Shakespeare separated the Prince and Falstaff outwardly, and led them inwardly by different paths. He intended again to bring forward Falstaff in Henry V., but as we heard before, he changed his mind. He made the Prince in Henry V. accomplish for himself his royal campaign and his noble conquest of love, and then to this heroic piece he placed in opposition one of a simple homely character, in which Falstaff follows out his old purse-stealing habits in a new form of love-suit. But he saw himself obliged to place this adventure of Falstaff's before Henry's accession to the throne and Falstaff's disgrace, because he must have felt, that after this glaring fall, in all the incorrigibleness and decrepitude of his paralytic age, Falstaff must necessarily have been ruined mentally and physically. But he exhibited him as separated from the prince, removed from the ennobling presence of that witty society, wholly abandoned to himself, and sinking to a greater degree than Henry rose; at last even, hardly conceivable as it may appear, utterly fallen in his own estimation. If it is possible to point out this ever increasing decline in Falstaff just as plainly as the growing greatness of Henry, there can be no doubt, that this piece was written as a counterpart to Henry V., whether any inducement on the part of the queen may have been furnished or not.

Henry as prince and king, with the most splendid subjects for his ambition before him, performed the highest

actions of renunciation and self-privation, which human power can win from the soul, and his finest deeds and the glory of them he cast from himself upon others, upon visible mortals or invisible powers. Falstaff we have seen throughout turning to the lowest subjects of covetousness and concupiscence. His mental power was subordinate to his physical impulses and necessities, every passion was in their service; in our present piece even that of love, which in all instances is enlivened by some spiritual spark, but by him is only feigned and pretended for a material object. His perfect selfishness referred the whole world and all creatures to himself alone and to the advantage he could draw from them; it appropriated everything to itself according to his theory of the natural right of animals, without a sense of the rights and possessions of others; it endeavoured to place the basest qualities in a good light, and to stamp cowardice as heroic courage. The one was the serious and harmful side of this egotism, by which Falstaff appeared as the enemy and destroyer of society; the other was its laughable side, which placed him in the first rank of what they call good companions. Both sides of this self-love, the harmful and the ridiculous, we find in our present piece, united in those wooings and in that kind of love, of which alone he was susceptible. He falls in with two homely simple citizens' wives in Windsor. They afford him a free kind of conversation and a merry humour; this is sufficient for him to look upon them as of the same metal as the women of his former intercourse. He woos them in disbelief of their morality, and, when he appears to succeed, even in confidence in his amiability. He aims not at love; he thinks only on artifices for improving his condition.

Both the wives keep the keys of the rich gold-coffers of their husbands; only for this reason does he admire women far from young, one of whom has already a marriageable daughter; he intends to make them his East and West Indies, and to trade with them both. He believes not in honesty; he looks down contemptuously with his knightly pride on the burgher-husbands; they are dace of another kind, which the pike endeavours to snap at in a new manner. It is even too dishonourable for Pistol and Nym to play the pander for so ridiculous a wooer; they had before been always *subject* to Falstaff's honour and conscience, but now he is more coarse in feeling than they, and only when these "baboons" and rogues venture to rebuke him with their *own* reputation, are his feelings roused. It is as much as he can do, he says to Pistol, to keep the terms of his honour precise. He himself sometimes, "hiding his honour in his necessity, is fain to shuffle and to lurch", and yet Pistol will "ensconce his rags" and coarseness under the shelter of his honour against him. We must now observe how he keeps the terms of his honour precise in the transaction which he is contriving. He so far cleverly begins it, that he comes forward to the honest burghers' wives at least in an honest tone; he is not inclined for fulsome flattery, he conceals this behind a masculine nature, which does not admit of it. But at the same time he is so gentlemanly careless, that he sends the same letter to both the women. The success which it meets with, transports him, but it also deprives him of all his senses; his sudden self-complacency makes him quite blind. After his vanity has led him to the monstrous idea of considering himself an object of love, nothing is impossible to him. He accepts

all the gross flatteries of master Brook as pure coin; he does not suffer himself to become suspicious by the strangest commission; he thinks the woman in love with him, though he hears that she is inflexibly honourable towards an ordinary well-grown man. Vanity and pride make him imprudently candid to this stranger, who, it is true, pays him. He has retained his well-known shamelessness, which belongs to this candour, but at the same time his judgment forsakes him. Twice he allows himself in the grossest manner to be cheated, bathed, and beaten, without being in the least more heedful of a third trap laid for him; although he said after the first trick, that if they served him such another, he would have his brains taken out and buttered and given to a dog. The wanton women have conspired against him, his despised servants also, his page is bribed; though many unequal powers are in arms against him, he surrenders himself to the very weakest, when he has once stumbled over his self-love. Confusion, blows, vapour-baths and cold baths, loss of money, pinches and burnings, the horns which he had designed for others, — all returns upon his own head; the consciousness of his guilt, the sudden fascination of his judgment, drive him at the last adventure to believe in and to fear even fairies; he mistakes even the voice of the parson Evans, and thinks him a Welsh fairy! When all is at length unriddled to him, he who never could attain to a knowledge of himself, is ashamed even to self-contempt. When he is thus degraded before himself and in his own judgment, Shakespeare might have hoped, to direct the judgment of his spectators with respect to this character more in accordance with his own view. But morally this would have been impossible. On this

point he had long ago so sunk, that he would not have been perplexed even by the perception, that it was just honesty and integrity, which had outwitted him. That they all at length assail him, and with the most shocking expressions call him intolerable, old, cold, slanderous, wicked, given to fornication, all this might not have made him think worse of himself. But on the side of his wit, an impression could still be made upon him. This was the gift, by which he felt himself superior to blockheads and equal with the clever. On this very side, which corrupted our own judgment, our judgment was to be rectified; and while the poet let him fall on this last commendatory side, he gave us the surest token, that he wished to remove him entirely from our esteem. And thus is it with Falstaff in this piece. All become thoroughly weary of him, and when he has lost his last charm, they cast him away. He had thought neither caution nor wit necessary to meet the burghers' honesty and ignorance, and he is bamboozled by both. He must acknowledge it himself, that "wit may be made a Jack-a-Lent, when 'tis upon ill employment"; the crafty wit is made "an ox and an ass", the robber is fleeced. This it is which grieves him, that ignorance itself is "a plummet" over him. It grieves him still more, that such a simple schoolmaster, as the Welshman Evans, who is as ignorant as his childish scholars, should make a fool of him. He finds that his star has forsaken him; "*this is enough to be the decay of lust and late-walking, through the realm!*" Thus degraded before himself, he seems so now not only to his companions, but to the reader and the spectator also. The poet has thus gained his end. Hazlitt, the great admirer of this character, perceives here in

Falstaff nothing more than a shameless and moreover, unsuccessful intriguer, whom wit and words have forsaken; he is, he says, no longer the same man. But we have pointed out the same motives in this as in the former Falstaff; the former rather never was the man which Hazlitt took him to be.

It was unquestionably Shakespeare's intention, to repeat here the moral lesson which he had placed in the second part of Henry IV., and in Henry V. He had probably observed effects of his Henry IV. on the stage, which did not please him; he, therefore, set forth in Henry V., the glaring example of punishment in Bardolph and Nym, and here he degrades the fat Falstaff in the highest distinction which he has sustained, that is in his wit. Possibly enough, Shakespeare himself saw in actual life, effects from this piece, which startled him and made him speak so forcibly. For we must know, that those scenes, which he depicted in Henry IV., were in his time not foreign to reality, that under Elizabeth's rule brawlers were the order of the day, who staked their honour in fighting and quarrelling, lads who called themselves like Poins, proper fellows of their hands, when in Bardolph's technical expression, they "cozened" on the highway vagabonds who lived on the industry of others, who turned night into day, sought good company in drinking and playing, and bravery in daring and swearing. Corresponding to all this, there appeared on the stage in large quantities those pieces of the later school, which entirely consisted in intrigues, bantering, cheating, and jokes, of a stern and repulsive nature, which moved in the stratum of English burgher-life, and represented a very loose morality. In opposition to this, perhaps,

Shakespeare emphasized so strongly the moral tendency of this piece, as far as it was practicable, if the merry pleasantry of the comedy were not to be lost. The honest citizens' wives in Windsor are quite beside themselves at the impudent and shameless wooing of the bulky courtier; they are incensed at the bad opinion which he has of honourable matrons; they almost begin to doubt whether in their honesty they may not have mistaken somewhat. Their mutual thought is, to revenge themselves on him; they would teach him to know turtles from jays; yet they have also a scruple as to playing any trick, which comes too near their honour. Great emphasis is laid throughout on honest knavery, in contrast to Falstaff's knavery. A wife, say the two women, may be merry and yet honest too; even at the end of the 17th century there was a song, which Halliwell quotes, in which alluding to the moral of this piece, the verse "wives may be merry and yet honest too", returns as a refrain. That these tricks played to Falstaff, were not only "admirable pleasures" but "*honest* knaveries" can alone move the plain, true, timid, and pious pastor to take pleasure in them. This simple but honest knavery celebrates its victory throughout over cunning and presumption. The crafty self-loving dig the pit and fall into it themselves; it is dug too strangely wide even for the simple, because self-conceited cunning estimates too lightly its opponent honesty. These words may be regarded as the soul of the piece. It is a reflection to be drawn from no other of Shakespeare's dramas, but only from this play of intrigue. All the under-plot of the piece relates to this point and to this lesson. The cunning host, a boaster full of mockery and tricks, who considers himself a great politician and Machiavellian,

teazes the wavering, fencing Dr. Caius and the pedantic Welshman Evans; the same vexation befalls him as Falstaff, that the 'simple men', who cannot even speak English, combine against him, and cheat the crafty man about his horses. The jealous Ford gives away money and name, and places the honour of his house at stake, only to learn more certainly the supposed treachery of his wife; the eaves-dropper hears not of his innocent better-half, but his own shame,* and suffers only torments himself, for those which he would have prepared for the envied unsuspecting Page and his innocent wife. In Page's house again other tricks are devised. Husband and wife conspire against each other and against the happiness of their innocent daughter, to whom the one wishes to give an awkward simpleton for a husband, and the other an odd fellow; mutually they fall into the snares laid for them, and Fenton brings home the bride, who has committed a "holy offence", since marriages are settled in heaven, and wives are not like land to be purchased by money. Equally in all these corresponding affairs does business seek to ensnare honesty, — cunning, simplicity, — jealousy, innocence, — avarice, the inoffensive nature; and their evil design reverts back upon themselves. Unclouded honest sense is always superior to base passion. And this moral, which links together these four intrigues, will we found, if we consider the piece from an ethical point of view (for the sake of its principal character and its development), to have a special reference to Falstaff's position and appearance. The selfishness which we ex-

* The sources for the farce between Falstaff and Brook are to be found in Giovanni Fiorentino's *Art of Loving* and in Straparola's *Ring*.

hibited as the soul of Falstaff's nature, appears at its highest climax, when, opposed to the virtue and simplicity which are its usual prey, it considers in its vain security the more subtle means of ensnaring as no longer necessary, and is thus ensnared in a gross trap. An egotist like Falstaff can suffer no severer defeat than from the honesty which he believes not, and from the ignorance which he esteems not. The poet has thus in this piece prepared for the more laughable side of self-love, a laughable tragi-comic fall, which as to time and the development of the plot, precedes the serious comic-tragic fall which meets Falstaff on the accession of the king, when the serious and mischievous side of his self-love was just on the point of a dangerous triumph.

AS YOU LIKE IT.

The pastoral comedy *As you Like it* has always extraordinarily pleased all German interpreters; it is only a pity that their interpretations have not had a similar fate. Tieck who called it Shakespeare's most playful comedy, maintained that the poet had in this play trifled most capriciously with time and place, that in the development and combination he had ridiculed and frivolously avoided rules which he had usually observed, and that he had even sacrificed, as in parody of himself, the truth of motive and the fundamental basis of composition, that he might write a truly free and merry comedy. According to this view, it would seem that Tieck found in playfulness, in irregularity, and in capriciousness as to composition and ground of action, the qualification of a "true" comedy! This Ulrici took up, and carried it out with respect to the impulses both of characters and actions. In the whole piece, he says, each acts or not, as he pleases; every character according to his humour indulges his inclinations to good and evil, as it occurs to him; the contingencies are not so much outward and objective, as inward and subjective, the humour and caprice of persons in their influence one upon another is

that from which the whole action proceeds, and in which at the same time the fantastical character of the piece consists. But in truth this capriciousness and neglect of rules on the part of the poet or his characters, does not exist at all in this piece. According to the designs of character in Frederick, Oliver, and the rest, neither the dethronement of the banished Duke is to be called whimsically capricious, as is here maintained, nor is the pursuit of Orlando groundless, nor his design to wrestle with Charles accidental, nor the turning and winding up of the whole plot to be considered fantastical. What further rules the poet should have frivolously avoided, or disregarded, Delius has already asked with wonder and surprise, without being able to reply. And that time and place are here more capriciously shifted, than in other pieces, in which Shakespeare gave access to the marvelous, is so little the case, that far rather among all dramas of this kind, this piece evidently makes the most timid use of the fanciful.

All that may have furnished a cause for these views and for these observations on our present comedy is limited to the following. We may regard this piece as probably intended for a masque, a style of drama in which the poet, whether by the introduction of wonderful machinery or by the display of all kinds of pageantry, permitted himself somewhat more license than elsewhere, but in no wise a license which interfered with the truth of his grounds for action or the just unravelling of his plot. Thus we are here transported to a romantic Arcadia, into which the forest of Arden is metamorphosed. Shakespeare met with this in the tale which furnished him with the material for his play; lions were from thence brought to France, and our poet added serpents and palm-trees. If

here with respect to the locality a slightly fanciful feature is introduced, this is also the case with respect to the human circumstances in Rosalind's pretence (and this Shakespeare likewise found in the source from which he drew), of having learned witchcraft from an uncle. But this feature also touches so skilfully on the limits of ordinary reality, that clever management in the performance might completely efface it; nothing prevents the piece from being thus understood, that Orlando, reminded of Oliver, recognized the beautiful Ganymede after his swoon, and let him only carry on his play that he might not mar his mirth; the subtleness of the play will be extraordinarily increased, if this is so taken in the performance. In this manner, our comedy only borders on the limits of the fantastical. And the justification of this lies in the style itself; whether it be that the poet composed the work as a masque, or as a pastoral drama, or as a piece uniting the two. Shakespeare borrowed the whole plan of the piece from a pastoral romance by Thomas Lodge, (*Rosalynde; Euphues golden Legacy*, 1590 and later) and he has evidently wished to form from it a pastoral play. The fanciful and ideal belonged to this species of poem, which here nevertheless lies rather in the general colouring than in single lines; the operatic style was peculiar to plays of this kind; many songs are therefore introduced, which in the performance very essentially contribute to produce the frame of mind in which this comedy should be received. A play like that which Rosalind makes Hymen perform, belongs to the characteristic style either of the pastoral or the masque. The truly pastoral scene between Silvius and Phœbe is called a pageant; rightly performed, it would stand out in the general description of rural and forest life

in our drama, as a play within the play, composed in a still more idealistic style than the real pastoral piece; acted by the best players, in all the unadorned simplicity of representation, it ought to be exhibited with such an odour of refinement as to show these children of nature raised above and withdrawn from the rude and agitated world. All these peculiarities of this species of poem, place our piece certainly somewhat out of the sphere of ordinary dramas; but we shall find the composition in its own way so profound, that even in this case the fact will be confirmed, that Shakespeare involuntarily improved and elevated every new material and style which he touched with his hand. It is true that in other more realistic pieces of Shakespeare's it does not occur that scenes, as here is twice the case, (Act IV. sc. 2. and Act V. sc. 3.) are inserted merely as stop-gaps without any action, but this is characteristic of idle rural life, where nothing of more importance happens than a slaughtered deer and a song about it. It is true that here more than in Shakespeare's other pieces, there are small subordinate parts, which signify little or nothing, but even in this respect more license is necessarily allowed to comedy than to tragedy. It is true that the characters are only here and there sketched in general outline, and even in those more worked out, it is rather by words than action. But this also is justified by the kind of poem; the subject for representation settled the characters, whose general social position and qualities were here more in question than their moral characteristics; and even in the principal figures, the mental character, the intellectuality, as in *Love's Labour's Lost*, was almost more to be displayed than the power of the will and the motive for important actions. For this

reason the actor will have some trouble in finding out these characters; but this done, he will be just as delighted and surprised at their inner congruity and truth, as in any other of our poet's themes. He will there perceive, that Shakespeare has not acted here otherwise than formerly, that he has in no wise parodied himself, that it may rather be considered a parody of all criticism, when our Romanticists, as in this case, would prove to us the poet's virtues by his faults.

Shakespeare met with the design of the story of this comedy in Lodge's pastoral romance; he only added the characters of the clown and of the melancholy Jaques, of William and Audrey; the remaining persons, under other names, work the threads of the action, as in Shakespeare. The style of the romance is prolix, affected, and bombastic, like all works of the kind; an exaggerated loquaciousness is the most striking characteristic of the extravagant mannerism of this narrator, as it is of all conceit-writers; Adam in the forest near starvation, and Orlando seeing the lion watching for its prey, hold long conversations. Many of the Ovid-like reminiscences and much of the mythological learning, with which the romance abounds, still adheres to Shakespeare's play, but on the whole he has completely eradicated the pastoral mannerism, and as ever, he simplifies the motives of the actions, and ennobles the actions themselves. The rude enmity between Oliver and Orlando, degenerating into acts of violence according to the romance, is properly moderated by our poet. He has set aside the unnaturalness of Celia's banishment by her father on her protest against the banishment of Rosalind. The war, by which the exiled prince regains his throne,

the rescue of the ladies from robbers, with which in the romance Celia's love for Oliver is introduced, these the dramatist has omitted, that he might not disturb the peace and merry sports of his rural life by any discords. The play between Orlando and Rosalind is in the romance only a pastoral song, but to this Shakespeare has precisely joined on the continuation of the action in the last act. In all the rest, the poet follows very truly the course of the story in the novel, without much addition and omission. Even the moral of the narrative he preserved closely before him, which in the romance is declared by perpetual repetitions, and is well adapted to the nature and position of the characters. The "sweetest salve for misery", this is the drift of the "golden legacy" of the tale, "is patience, and the only medicine for want that pretious implaister of content." We must brave misfortune with equanimity and meet our destiny with resignation. Thus the two ladies, and thus Orlando, laugh at Fortune and disregard her power. All the three, or counting Oliver four, principal figures have this in common in their lot, that love is added as a new evil (it is thus viewed) to their outward misfortunes, to banishment and poverty. This also they strive to meet with the same weapon, with control and moderation, not too much evading it, nor too much desiring it, with more regard to virtue and nature, than to riches and rank, like Rosalind, when she chooses the posthumous Orlando, and Oliver the shepherdess Celia. The loving pastoral couple forms a contrast in this respect, that Silvius loves too ardently, whilst Phœbe despises love too coldly. If we concentrate this moral reflection into one idea, we shall find that it is self-mastery, equanimity, self-command in outward suffering and inward

passion, whose praise is to be proclaimed. That this idea lies at the root of Shakespeare's comedy also, we should scarcely imagine at the first glance. So completely is every reflection avoided, so entirely in the lightest and freest play of action and conversation is a mere picture sketched for our contemplation.

The author of the romance of *Rosalind* contrasts town- and court-life with rural and pastoral life, the one as a natural source of evil and misery, which finds its natural remedy in the other. "The greatest seas," he says, "have the sorest storms, small currents are ever calm. Cares wait upon a crown. Joyfulness dwells in cottages. The highest birth has more honour, but is subject to the most bale. Grievs are incident to dignity, and sorrows haunt royal palaces." On the contrary contentment lives in the country, and we "drink there without suspicion and sleep without care, unstirred by envy. Desires mount not there above our degrees, nor our thoughts above our fortunes". Just so Shakespeare makes his *Corydon* sensible of the dignity of his pastoral condition, in which he lives upon his honest gains, envying no man's happiness, glad of other men's good, content with his toil. Just so he appears to let the sorrows, which arise at the court in the first and second acts, find their cure in the pastoral life of the three last acts. Just so he has imputed the cause of the disasters created there, to the vices which belong to courts and to worldly life, to the envy and hatred, which arise from covetousness and ambition, and in the same manner he has sought the remedy for the wounds there struck, in that moderation and simple contentment, to which a life of solitude invites or even compels. The first acts begin therefore like a tragedy; they

exhibit the actors in a state of war, from which they subsequently escape or are driven away to the merry sports of pleasure and peace, which await them in the forest of Arden with its hunting-life and in the shepherds' cottages on its border. Duke Frederick is called even by his daughter a man of harsh and envious mind; he appears to be perpetually actuated by gloomy fancies, by suspicion and mistrust, and to be urged on by covetousness. He has banished his brother and usurped the throne, he has robbed all the lords who have gone with him, of their property, he has regarded with hostile suspicion all honourable men, the old Rowland de Bois as well as his brave Orlando, he has surrounded himself with the dishonourable, who nevertheless, like Le Beau, are not devoted to him. Orlando's victory over the wrestler is enough to kindle his suspicion against him; once awakened it lights upon the hitherto spared Rosalind with no other ground, than because she throws his daughter into the shade, at which the father's vein of envy is roused, a passion, which he wishes the inoffensive Celia to share also. When both the friends upon this disappear at the same time with Orlando, Frederick's suspicion and covetousness now falls upon Oliver, whom he had hitherto favoured. In this eldest son of the brave Rowland de Bois, there flows the same vein of avarice and envy as in the Duke. He strives to plunder his brother of his poor inheritance, he undermines his education and gentility, he first seeks to stifle his soul, and then he lays snares for his life: all from an undefined hatred of the youth, whom he is obliged to confess is full of noble device, but who for this very quality draws away the love of all his people from Oliver to himself, and on this account excites

his envious jealousy. Both, the Duke and Oliver, equally forfeit the happiness which they seek, the one, the heir of his usurped dukedom, the other his lawful and unlawful possessions. And in this lies the first impulse and the material motive for their subsequent renunciation of the world; a more moral incentive to this change of mind is given to Oliver in the preservation of his life by Orlando, and to the Duke in the warning voice of a religious man, who speaks to his conscience and his fear. These are only sketches of characters, not intended to play conspicuous parts; but we see, that they are drawn by the same sure hand, which we have seen at work throughout Shakespeare's works.

The misery, which proceeds from these two covetous and ambitious men, who were not even contented in and with their prosperity, first of all affected the deposed Duke. He took flight with "a many merry men" to the forest of Arden, where they live "like the old Robin Hood of England, and fleet the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world." They spend their days in hunting, singing, and meditation. Their songs call their thoughts from ambition to nature and simple life, where no ingratitude of man, no forgotten kindness and friendship torments, but at the most the rough air and storms of winter, which they praise in smiling consideration, that they are no flatterers, but counsellors, that feelingly warn them what they are. Thus withdrawn from the dangers of the "envious court", they have learned to love exile beyond the painted pomp of the palace; endowed with patience and contentment, they have translated "the stubbornness of fortune into so quiet and so sweet a style"; and sweet appear to them

"the uses of adversity,
Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head".

In this life, they find

"Tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in every thing".

The fragrance of the country, the scent of the wood, the tone of solitude, in this part of the piece, have been always justly admired; colouring and scenery gently and tenderly attune the imagination of the reader; they make us understand, how hermits in such a region feel impelled to fill up the leisure and void with meditation and reflection, and to open the heart to every soft emotion; the noise of the world falls only from afar on the ear of the happy escaped ones, and the poet has carefully avoided, in any way inharmoniously to disturb this profound peace. When the starved Orlando casts in the first and last discord, by frightening the Duke and his companions at their meal, how wonderfully is this discord resolved at once by the loving gentleness, with which they meet and help the needy one!

Only the one danger does this life possess, that by its monotony it awakes in one and another, ennui, melancholy, and ill-humour. In the hunting circle round the duke, Jaques is in this condition. He shares with the Duke and his companions the propensity for drawing wisdom and philosophy from the smallest observation and consideration; he has the gift to excess, of linking reflections to the least event, and in this seclusion from the world they have assumed a touch of despondency. The melancholy which this man sucks out of every occasion, always appeared to most readers and especially to most actors, mild, human, and attractive, and it is thus represented; but it is

rooted rather in a bitterness and ill-humour, which render the witty and sententious worldling far more a rude fault-finder than a contented sufferer like the rest. He is of that class of men to whom Bacon addresses this sentence: — “He who is prudent, may seek to have a desire; for he who does not strive after something with eagerness, finds everything burdensome and tedious.” In his hypochondriacal mood, in his spirit of contradiction, while the remembrance of his travels and his former worldly life have left a sting behind, Jaques finds this forest-life just as foolish as that of the court which they have quitted; he carries the state of nature and peace too far, he considers the chase of the animals of the forest to be greater usurpation than that of the unlawful duke; he flees from the solitary company into still greater solitude, and likes to hide his thoughts, the fruit of his former experience and of his present leisure; then again with great eagerness he goes in quest of society and cheerful company. Wholly “compact of jars”, he is blunted to all friendly habits, he is discontented with all, and even with the efforts of others to satisfy him; angry at his own birth and at his fortune, he rails against “all the first-born of Egypt”, he blames the whole world, finds matter for censure in the great system of the world, and stumbles over every grain of dust in his path. Long experienced in sin, he has learned to find out the shadow-side of every age of man; he has satiated himself with the world and has not entered upon this life of retirement, furnished with the patience and contentment of the others, but from a natural passion for the contrary. If his satire is directed more to things in general and is free from bitterness towards stated individuals, this is only a result of his

inactive nature, which is rather calculated for observation and reflection, than for work and action, and of his isolated position in this idyllic life so free from jars, in which moreover the poet will suffer no discord to arise. This character is entirely Shakespeare's property and addition. It furnishes a fresh instance to us of the two-sidedness of the poet's mind, with which so many proofs have made us familiar. Shakespeare does not imitate the trivial tradition of the pastoral poets, who praise the quiet life of nature in itself as a school for wisdom and contentment. He shows in the contrast between Jaques and the duke, that those who would desire enjoyment and advantage from this life, must in themselves have a natural disposition for moderation and self-mastery, they must be able to disarm misfortune, and to do without outward happiness. But this Jaques, according to the Duke, has been himself a libertine, leading a sensual and dissolute life, and he has now leaped from one extreme to another, a blasé man, an exhausted epicurean, an outcast from life. The sensible Orlando with true instinct perceives his censoriousness, regarding him as a fool or a cipher; Rosalind discovers it, who quite in the poet's own meaning with regard to those who are in extremity of either joy or sorrow, calls the fools who are ever laughing, and those who carry melancholy to excess, "abominable fellows who betray themselves to every modern censure, worse than drunkards". Thus carrying to excess his gloomy love of calumny, Jaques rebounds in another extreme, when he wishes to be invested in the fool's motley, to have "as large a charter as the wind", to blow on whom he pleases, and to cleanse "the foul body of the infected world". Quite mistaking the inoffensive vocation of the fool, he wishes to "disgorge"

into the general world the poison he has caught from his bad experience. As no opportunity for this is offered, he turns at last, retaining his former part, to the hermit Frederick, because "out of these convertites there is much matter to be heard and learned".

We have seen how the banished duke has converted his misery into smiling happiness. He is joined subsequently by the two ladies, Rosalind and Celia, and by Orlando. In them the poet has shewn us, what qualities caused them to spend the time in the "golden world" of Arden more pleasurably than the melancholy Jaques. A more than sisterly bond inseparably chains the two cousins; in the romance they are compared with Orestes and Pylades; and in their fervent friendship alone we see the gift of self-renunciation, which renders them strangers to all egotism. Innocent and just, Celia solemnly promises at a future time to restore to Rosalind her withdrawn inheritance; she demands of her in return to be as merry as she is herself; she would, she says to her, had their positions been different, have been happier, and she proves this subsequently, when, more friend than daughter, she follows the banished cousin into exile. Rosalind has for a long time disarmed her uncle's envy and suspicion by her innocent nature, which even in thought wishes no evil to an enemy; he was overcome by the universal impression of her character, which won for her the praise and pity of the people. She bore her sorrow in smoothness, silence, and patience; her friendship for Celia lightened it; she constrained herself from love to her, to be more cheerful than became her position. We recognize plainly the nature, with which Lodge also invested Rosalind in his novel, that disposition to command

herself and to deprive misfortune of its sting. But for this we must not consider her cold and heartless. She feels deeply, that fortune has punished her with disfavour; and when in the person of Orlando she meets one equally struck by fate, her heart, taken unawares, betrays how accessible she is to the most lively feelings. The similarly hapless circumstances which Orlando announces to her, his combat with the wrestler, his descent from an old friend of her father's, — all this added to his attractive manner helps to conquer *her*, who has already vanquished *him*. Her pride fell with her fortunes; she gives the victor a chain, which seals at once her fate and her almost hereditary love; she rashly and involuntarily reveals her feelings, because she has only moments in which to see him, she turns back to him, once again she even says to him, that he has overthrown more than his enemies; and immediately afterwards we find her fallen fathom-deep in love. We see indeed that here is a violent passion to be mastered; *how* she may master it, is afterwards the problem, which she has to solve in her subsequent meeting with Orlando. In this Orlando on his side we perceive just as readily the same naturally excitable temperament, and at the same time the power of self-command, which knows how to restrain it. He has been trained like a peasant by his brother and treated like a slave; he feels the disadvantage of his deficient education more than the crushed nobility of his birth; the spirit of his father grows strong in him; he will no longer endure the unworthy treatment, and when Oliver insults in him the honour of his father, he attacks his elder brother, not so far, however, as according to the romance to forget himself in violence against him or to lay snares for revenge,

but even in anger he is master of himself. The feeling of his nothingness struggles in his mind with an ambitious striving. He seeks the combat with the feared wrestler Charles, contented to meet death, since he has no honour to lose and no friends to wrong, but still hoping to recommend himself by victory and to secure himself from his brother. Instead of this he provokes the duke to suspicion and excites Oliver to designs against his life, and although he has just tested his power, he prefers to wander away, than to meet the malice of his brother. So in the wood afterwards, with the anxiety of childlike fidelity and the strength of an irritated wild beast, he is quickly resolved to maintain with sword and violence the life of his fainting old servant, but he is gentle as a lamb again, when he meets with friendly courteousness. Still later, when he sees his brother sleeping in the arms of danger, he is not untempted to revenge, but fraternal love prevails. Throughout we see the healthful, self-contained, calm nature of a youth, which promises a perfect man. All in him bespeaks a child of nature, who has remained pure and uninjured in the midst of a corrupt world. What a shaming contrast to the calumniator Jaques, to whom he thus replies, when he invites him to rail with him against the deceitful world, "I will chide no breather in the world, but myself; against whom I know most faults"! How innocent does the young Hercules appear in his laconic bashfulness, when love has "overthrown" him, when Rosalind makes him her valuable gift and her more valuable confession, and he finds no words to thank her for the one and to reply to the other!

In all these characteristics, with all the three, we shall not mistake the predisposition to a natural power of resistance

against the overwhelming force of outward evil, as well as of the inward emotions of the mind. Endowed with this gift, they bear about with them a spring of happiness, as the ladies prove by their merry league, in the very scene of hatred and persecution. But this spring will surely flow more richly as soon as it is set free from hindrances, as soon as it is freed from the intricate and manifold passions of a rude and intriguing society, left to itself, and thrown on its own affections and feelings. Hardly, therefore, is Rosalind's forced uneasy connection with her uncle broken up, than she feels herself freer in the unhappiness of exile, than in the happiness of a court-life; the true friendship of Celia gives loose to her innate good humour, which had hitherto been fettered; the prospect of seeing her father again makes her enterprising and bold; she conquers her womanly fear, and takes upon herself to play the part of a man, and that a martial one. The fair Ganymede in his hunter's dress exhibits forthwith a certain power of self-command when compared to the enervated Celia; the weariness of the journey, the meeting with Silvius, whose tears open his love-wounds afresh, cannot destroy his good humour. Rosalind endures her love silently; not so the wandering Orlando, who tells his to the deaf woods, while he carves the name of Rosalind on the barks, and hangs odes to her praise, the essays of an untutored talent, upon the trees. Celia finds the poet; amid the convulsions of their fate, the two, so suddenly united and separated, meet again strangely and unexpectedly; when Rosalind surmises it by the hints of Celia, we see again the intensely agitated being, who appears unable to conceal her feelings. How her blood rises to her cheeks! What haste is there in her questions! With what sweet impatience does her anticipation

burst forth! One inch of delay seems to her more than "a South-sea-off discovery"! When she now hears of his presence, and ventures to hope to retain him, to possess him, pursued by no envious eye, entirely and undisturbed in this pastoral solitude and retirement, here where (according to the words of the romance) opportunity, (the sweetest friend to Venus), harbours in the cottages, we now see her who was before at the court so gentle, so silent, and so patient, suddenly seized with a wanton love of teasing, with the most excited joy, with breathless talkativeness; her happiness overflows like a springtide, from which we are inclined to fear everything. But in love as she was, says the novel, she "shrouded her pains in the cinders of honourable modesty". To love, says Rosalind in Shakespeare, is a woman's way, but also, not to confess that she does. At the time when, under the impulse of the moment she discovered herself to Orlando, she gave the lie to this her own rule, and all that she now does in the delight of perfect idleness, is as if she would make amends for her fault. The characters are changed; once he was bashful and flattering, and she was candid, now she is reserved with her love, when he is confessing it to the winds and to men, to all who will listen to it. Once she had betrayed her feelings to him, now she delights on their first meeting in drawing *his* confession from him, and she goes through all the variations of it with secret delight, with feigned jest and derision. It is not difficult, to bring one so proud of his love to an avowal, that he is the poetical panegyrist of Rosalind; then she discovers, that he does not look like a lover, that he has nothing of the "careless desolation" of the lover about him: she would fain hear his protest. She tries to set him against his love

that she may test its constancy; it is a tonic to her, when with calm certainty he says that he would not be cured of his love. With her ingenious acuteness, she knows how to place herself in a position to be herself, and yet not to appear so, to enjoy the presence and affection of her lover, and yet not to surrender herself immodestly to one untested, — to love, as she said, yet not to confess, and thus to fulfil the desires of her impatient patience, of her eloquent silence. Whilst Shakespeare, following the romance, thus prepares the ground, so that Rosalind without violating her morality can give free scope to her love, he has avoided all the express moralizing of the romance, both here and in Oliver's connection with Celia. There also Celia warns herself to love with patience, not to be too timid nor too bold; she first yields, when Oliver speaks of marriage; modesty is here also the guide of action. Shakespeare has treated this connection of Celia's very shortly; from an expression while at the court, we may conclude, that she regards love-affairs altogether more coldly and more practically than Rosalind; her rapid engagement to Oliver is therefore not without its design; but that Shakespeare also regarded the speedy marriage as a preventive against unchastity, may be gathered from a single word. It would have weakened the power of the comedy, had the poet entered in any way further into the meaning of the moral lectures of the romance. Moreover he has so maintained Rosalind's character, that the truth of the delineation itself exempted him from this prosaic interruption. In herself she is little qualified for reflection; not from minute deliberation, but from a natural instinct, which adroitly seizes an offered opportunity, she hits upon the expedient for curbing

her passion by forcing it into a play of fancy, and for mastering heart and feeling by giving employment to mind and soul. In this way she preserves her morality and wards off melancholy and sadness from herself and her lover, and thus the poet in quite another manner to Lodge in his romance, obtains the unusual æsthetic advantage of introducing into the barrenness of retired life this spring of wit, which gushes forth in its unhindered course, in free nature, far from all conventionality. Formerly in her paternal home the dark Celia was the more merry of the two friends, but now her more quiet reserve constitutes a foil to the playfulness of Rosalind, which in her unexpected prosperity knows no bounds.

Orlando enters into Rosalind's sport rather passively than actively. In their similar circumstances in the town, he was the active one, as the man ought to be, and she the enduring one; in this little love-intrigue the woman is rightly the instigator and leader. He allows himself, neither willingly nor unwillingly, to be drawn into the strange plan of wooing Ganymede as his Rosalind. He discovered the resemblance between the two, he regards her at first as the brother of his beloved one, he is at ease and pleased when near her, he has an object for his sighs, and what lover lamented and did not gladly evidence his love! But with all this he is not so ardent in his service, because his healthful nature does not possess the melancholic and sentimental vein of amorousness. Rosalind thinks, when he keeps not his time, that it might well be said of him that "Cupid had clapped him o' the shoulder", but had left him heart-whole. In this tone she torments the poor man, who naturally cannot satisfy her, and this inflicted pain is only made

amends for by that which she suffers herself, as soon as she is alone. Then we see by her impatient humour, by her upbraidings, by her tears, by her fear of losing him again, that her teasing frolicsomeness really demanded self-mastery, that she in fact needed self-command to sustain her part, that tenderness and feeling went ever hand in hand with her playfulness. This we might readily forget in those passages, where she tortures him with assumed cruelty, where she almost heartlessly endeavours to make him fearful and anxious respecting his marriage and his mistress, where she seems to exhibit the characteristics of a cold ironical nature. There also, when she depicts to him a woman's wit (Act IV. sc. 1.) never to be checked, never to be put out of countenance, one might argue indeed sadly for poor Orlando. But in her nature throughout there is in rare union the most just balance of the powers of feeling and intelligence; the sensibility of Viola and the wit of Beatrice are blended in her; the poet has invested her with a remarkably free tongue, in order that we may not be misled into the error of believing that in her discretion even a trace of conventional reserve or of asceticism might have been at work; Phœbe designates exactly this two-sidedness of her nature, when she says, that her soft eye is at variance with her sharp words, and heals the wounds which her tongue makes. In the midst of her merriment therefore, when Orlando goes away, how suddenly the softness of heart breaks forth in the words: "Alas, dear love, I cannot lack thee two hours"! How she makes every effort to have him back quickly! How she sighs away the while the short time of separation! And then when, instead of him, Oliver comes and tells the story of Orlando's hurt, she faints away;

the complete woman comes to light in the disguised man, and her perfect love breaks forth from its covering. The riddle is now solved. Oliver sees through her; "You a man?" he says; "you lack a man's heart." Then she betrays herself further, by expecting him to believe that her swoon was counterfeited. He believes her not. The conviction strikes him; he leaves her, jestingly calling her Rosalind. We must assume that Oliver imparted his discovery to Orlando. Now it is Orlando's turn to carry on the sport, that he may not spoil her pleasure, and this is no small trial of *his* patience. She asks him, if his brother told him that she had counterfeited a swoon. He answers ambiguously, "Ay, and greater wonders than that". It is as if she feared his discovery, when she refers this reply at once to Celia's betrothal. Every following word of Orlando's increases in delicacy, if the part is thus understood, that he knows from this time forth, with whom he has to do. And thus it becomes also explicable, when at last the disclosure scarcely excites any surprise.

The contrast, which the pastoral episode between Phœbe and Silvius affords, will now become clear; or should it not, we must gather the explanation of it likewise from Lodge's romance, where it is perspicuous even to dulness. In contrast to the active excitement of the court and town, peace and quiet rule in this pastoral life; while in the one, envy and hatred carry on their intrigues, in the other love at most plays its innocent tricks. Love is, according to the romance, as precious in a shepherd's eye as in the looks of a king; the opportunity for love and its fidelity belongs especially to this class, because solitude increases the disposition to sociability. Thus we find Silvius possessed of

a violent and importunate love, full of all those thousand follies, in which lovers magnify the smallest thing that affects their passion, into the most sacred and important matter. The tale, always true to its one moral, upbraids him with the immoderateness of his love, because he knows not how to conceal it with patience. We here see plainly the contrast to the love of Rosalind, although in Shakespeare she says, that her passion was much upon the fashion of Silvius'. But this indeed as little, as Rosalind approaches the fashion of Phœbe, in whose tone indeed, and wholly in like manner, she shews herself averse to all hyperbolical protestations of love. But this in her is a healthful nature, which dislikes every exaggeration; in Phœbe, whom the poet depicts as a regular beauty (black-haired, with bugle eye-balls and cheeks of cream), it is coyness, hatred of love, and the presumptuous pride of wishing to conquer it. The wise medium, which the two friends seek between timidity and craving for love, is missed by Phœbe and Silvius in an opposite manner. That Rosamond has a certain share of the fashion of both of them, places her upon a middle ground, upon which she shows herself at once capable and ready to humble the pride of Phœbe with greater pride, and on the other hand to strengthen the humility of the poor worm Silvius. Between them both, the town-lady and her Orlando appear as the really ingenuous children of true nature, contrasted with the overstrained creations of a conventional fiction.

Another contrast is formed by the relation of the clown to Audrey, which is wholly Shakespeare's addition. Touchstone, in his verses to the rough country-girl, in intercourse with whom he imagines himself like Ovid among

the Goths, parodies the languishing poetry of Orlando, in his false marriage by Sir Oliver he parodies that of Rosalind and Orlando by Celia, and in his submissive humour in marrying the ugly Audrey, he parodies the unequal unions of the rest. His marriage, however, is only pretended; he contracts it not like Celia, to avoid immorality, but to indulge in it. He does the contrary to Rosalind and Orlando; he misuses this natural life of retirement, in the intention of again casting off Audrey at a convenient season. He uses the opportunity which here presents itself, without possessing the fidelity, which according to Lodge's romance should belong to the place. He seems equally devoid of the morality of either town or country. His language reminds us of the time when he belonged to this rural life and its habits, but now he would fain act the courtier. As Jaques went with the Duke into retirement, so he followed Celia from attachment to her, but not from personal inclination; he behaves like a courtier, when he speaks of his condescending affection, when he repulses the poor William, when he displays his knowledge of the catechism of honour to the courtly bully, when he depreciates the shepherd's life to Corin, and in jesting exaggeration perceives the same sin in the propagation of sheep, as Jaques seriously does in the chase. And in the same manner he displays his loose courtly morals with respect to the honourable Audrey.

In *Touchstone*, Shakespeare has for the first time produced a fool of a somewhat more elevated nature. In all the earlier comedies clowns only have played, natural fools whose wit is more studied or mechanically prepared or is given out in droll unconsciousness. The fool alone in *All's Well that Ends Well* has somewhat of the "prophetic" vein

in him, which he ascribes to himself according to the general notion of the age, that fools, in virtue of their capacity for speaking "the truth the next way", possessed something of a divine and foretelling character. Shakespeare rendered complete homage to this notion of the age respecting the higher significance of fools, at least in his artistic efforts. The over-wisdom, which from learned haughtiness and pedantry, or from self-love, or corrupt taste, looks down contemptuously or censoriously on these characters of comedy, he left to the Ben Jonsons and the Malvolios, without regarding them. He has, as we have now often seen, invested even the simple clowns with a deeper significance, in the relations which he always gave them to the action of the piece, without fearing to place constraint on nature and truth; for who has not often witnessed in living examples, how mother-wit solves unconsciously and without trouble problems over which the wise labour, and a childlike mind executes in simplicity, that which no understanding of the intelligent perceives? But a higher value than this is attributed by Shakespeare to the men of wit, to the real fools, who play their part with knowledge, to whom full power is given to speak the truth, to rend asunder, as often as they will, the veil of mere propriety and hypocrisy, and wittily to unmask the folly of others under cover of their own folly. This appeared to Shakespeare "a practice, as full of labour as a wise man's art", and as useful as a chaplain's discourse. For it appeared to him to belong to the most expert knowledge of the world and of men, of the "quality of persons and the time", to use appropriately and wisely the sting of seeming folly; marvelous appeared to him the watchful and acute

mind, which was quick enough to discover the veiled weaknesses of men and understood how like "the haggard to check at every feather, that comes before his eye". But for men in general he considered the presence of a fool as a useful test of head and heart. To Parolles, Malvolio, and such-like knaves or angular pedants, the witticisms of fools are like inopportune "cannon-bullets", while to the generous and the guiltless, who have a free conscience; they pass for "slight bird-bolts". The wit of fools shoots vainly past these innocent ones; those who shrink at the whizzing of its arrows, discover their folly, though perhaps the motley man did not even aim them. When life approached not this play of fancy, this privileged folly was a profession, a vocation. Just at Shakespeare's time it passed from life to the stage, and with this it began to disappear from society itself. This was perhaps a further challenge to Shakespeare, to dignify it, and to rescue it for his art. But from the coarseness of the actors, and the inclination of the people to laugh alone at the clumsy ludicrous jokes of the clown, this was very difficult. We have before mentioned, what misuse of the privileges of the fool, Tarlton and Kempe made upon the stage; as long as this continued, as long as the principal art of these actors and the principal pleasure of the public was, that they should stretch out the chin, let their hands hang, and twirl their wooden swords, Shakespeare could hardly venture to bring a more refined character of this sort upon the stage. Kempe twice withdrew from the company at the Blackfriars' theatre. Only when he and his like were removed, could Shakespeare write that more refined programme in Hamlet for the actor of the fool, only then could he bring upon the

stage the fools of *As you Like it*, *What you Will*, and *Lear*. Touchstone in our present piece is not quite so expert nor so sensible of his wit as the fools in *What you Will* and *Lear*; but he is also not on the same ground with Costard, Launce, and Launcelot. He stands on the doubtful limit between instinct and consciousness, where this character is the most acceptable. Jaques regards him as a clown, who has "crammed" the strange places of his dry brain with observation, which "he vents in mangled forms"; he considers him as one of those "natural philosophers" (by whom Warburton ought to have understood nothing more than a natural fool), of whom Touchstone himself says, that they have learned no wit by nature nor art. The two ladies call him by turns a natural and a fool; Celia, in his face, ascribes to him the dulness of the fool, which is the whetstone of the witty, while to the true fool the folly of others is the whetstone of his wit. And Touchstone himself assumes the appearance of being wiser, than he himself knew; he shall, he says, ne'er be 'ware of his own wit, till he breaks his shins against it. On the other hand from his expressions in other passages he regards himself as far superior to the clown and the natural philosopher, and the Duke readily perceives his design behind his interposing folly; "he uses his folly," he says, "like a stalking-horse, and under the presentation of that, he shoots his wit."

Entirely corresponding with this two-sided capacity are his actions and language throughout the piece. He performs his tricks in the manner of the clowns, with whom roguish acts pass for wit. On the other hand the poet has consigned to him the part of the comic chorus in the comedy, in which the fool should be always employed.

We have shewn above, in what contrast the connection between Touchstone and Audrey is brought to that of the other couples; the idealized pastoral love is parodied in it by one of a more real nature. These contrasts were peculiar to the pastoral drama. Thomas Heywood, in characterizing the pastoral plays of Shakespeare's time, uses these words: "If we present a pastoral, we shew the harmless love of shepherds, diversely moralized, distinguishing between the craft of the city and the innocency of the sheepecote." We see indeed, according to this definition that Shakespeare's play is nothing else than a pastoral; the habits of town and country are brought into manifold contrasts; the moral, which the poet draws, may indeed be essentially diverse from that, which, in the pastoral romances and dramas of the age, would be usually inferred from that distinction of town and country. Shakespeare has employed the mouth of his fool as his stalking-horse, to express his opinion of the customary idealizing of shepherd-life in pastoral poetry, in the same sense, as it is manifested in his play and in the scenes it contains. On Corin's question, as to how he likes this shepherd's life, Touchstone answers him: "Truly, shepherd, in respect of itself, it is a good life; but in respect, that it is a shepherd's life, it is naught. In respect, that it is solitary, I like it very well; but in respect, that it is private, it is a very vile life. Now in respect it is in the fields, it pleaseth me well; but in respect it is not in the court, it is tedious. As it is a spare life, look you, it fits my humour well; but as there is no more plenty in it, it goes much against my stomach. Hast any philosophy in thee, shepherd?" It seems to me, that perhaps all pastoral poetry put together scarcely contains so much real wisdom,

as this philosophy of the fool. He finds nothing to say against the shepherd's life, but nothing also against the contrary manner of living, and the homely simplicity of Corin himself is on his side in this, that he leaves courtly manners to the court, and country ones to the country. Shakespeare knew nothing of the one-sidedness, which condemned or rejected either life in the world or life in retirement, the one for the sake of the other. Rather does the fool's wit consider him who merely knows the one, or as the meaning is, merely esteems the one, as "damned, like an ill-roasted egg, all on one side". In Shakespeare's play, no expression of preference rests on either of the two kinds of life. In neither of the two circles does he find the condition of happiness or virtue in itself, but he sees happiness most surely dwelling, not in this or that place, but in the beings, who have a capacity and a natural share of qualification for either or for every other kind of existence; in those beings, who, exiled from the world, do not feel themselves miserable, just as little so, as when they are recalled to the world from their solitude. The poet knows nothing of a certain situation, condition, or age, which would be a sure source of happiness, but he knows that there are men in all classes and generations, like his Duke, his Rosalind, his old Adam Spencer, who bear in their bosoms that equanimity and contentment, which is the only fruitful soil of all true inner happiness, and who carry with them wherever they go, a smiling Eden and a golden age.

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

The serious part of *Much Ado about Nothing*, the relation between Hero and Claudio, is similar to the story of Ariodante and Ginevra in the fifth Canto of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, a subject, which had been already handled in 1583, and was performed before Elizabeth under this title (*Ariodante and Ginevra*). Ariosto's epos was translated in 1591 by John Harington; but even earlier that episode was separated from it, and had been even twice translated into English; Spenser also in the second canto of his *Fairie Queene* had introduced it with some alteration. In Bandello's 22nd tale, of Timbreo of Cardona, the same subject is handled, and arguing from the names employed for the acting characters, Shakespeare has availed himself of this source for his play, without going back to Ariosto. Now this tale presented not even a hint to the poet for any moral view of the story; it is a bald narrative which affords us nothing for the understanding of the Shakespearian piece; in the former piece he had to conceal the vast moralizing of the source from which he drew it; in this material on the other hand, he had first to strike the concealed ethical spark within it. The errors between Claudio and Hero were

transferred by Shakespeare from the shallow novel into life; he dived into the nature of such an incident; he investigated the probable character of the beings among whom it was imaginable; he found the key-note, by which he could bring the whole picture into harmony. The subject expanded in his hands; the main action received an explanatory prelude; the principal characters (Hero and Claudio) obtained an important counterpart in the connection between Benedick and Beatrice, which is entirely Shakespeare's property; these characters gained an importance even beyond the principal ones; the plot, as is ever the case with our poet, and as Coleridge has especially pointed out in this play, gave place to the characterization; the question seems almost rather, what manner of men made the *much ado* about nothing, than as to the *nothing* about which ado was made. The whole stress seems to lie, not on the plot, not on the outward interest of the catastrophe, but in the moral significance, which the disturbance caused by the Bastard John exercises upon the two engagements which are concluded and prepared, which are again dissolved and not yet confirmed, or rather upon the couples, upon the beings, who have entered into these engagements. But whilst the poet in this manner sought after the conditions of the subject represented, after the natural capacity and culture of the characters qualified to act in it, he has, it seems to us, lighted upon a soil, which places this piece in an express contrast to *As you Like it*, which was written at the same time. Considered as to outward form, the teasing war of wit between Benedick and Beatrice calls to mind the similar relation of Rosalind to Orlando, but in the development of the plot an opposite course of events at once meets

the eye. While in the one a princely court and a great feudal house appear mutually at variance with themselves, we pass in the other into a similar circle, in which the most delightful harmony reigns. While in the one, the play began in a tragic character with hostile persecution, and afterwards in the three last acts is developed into a comedy of an uninterruptedly cheerful nature, in the other, on the reverse, the merriest humour plays throughout the three first acts, and then the comedy threatens to change suddenly into an express tragedy. While in the one, the beings stand in the foreground, who, schooled by misfortune, endowed with self-command, equanimity, and self-possession, become master over their misfortune, in the other, we are transported into a group of persons, who, *used* to prosperity and *abused* by prosperity, have fallen with the finest natural disposition into the opposite faults: into want of stability, into self-loving inconstancy, into frivolity and credulity, in one word, into that giddiness which fortune produces, fickle and giddy as she is herself, and in which the man, too dependent on the moment, is not master of his judgment and resolves. And finally, while in the one, those strong and undismayed ones find in the height of their misery comfort and alleviation in the tender peace of a life of retirement, these effeminate ones are alarmed at the summit of their prosperity by a tragic incident, which arouses their indolent natures, and imparts a salutary warning to them on their course of life.

Adhering to this view, we shall perceive how with all its poetic licence our comedy is connected in all its parts, and what a deep back-ground is here given to a most insipid plot. We enter the house of the governor of Messina, which is raised by riches and great alliances, and

in which a wholly untroubled domestic happiness, both as to circumstances and persons, meets our eye. A merry company smiles upon us in the first scene, on the reception of an unknown messenger; a friendly honourable visit is announced which is even to increase its gaiety and conviviality. The most intimate familiarity rules among the members of the family, or rather of the house, both high and low. The servants listen to the guests, and give a report to their masters, the uncle Antonio at the masked ball accosts the waiting-maid, who reproaches him with his wagging head, and ridicules his wit; Hero's gentlewomen presume even with the foreign guests; they are accustomed to go to the utmost bounds in jesting with Leonato's daughter and niece. On a similarly intimate footing even the Watch of Messina stands with the governor. Dogberry and Verges talk with him as with any other gossip; they are merciful and lazy in their station and calling, and let every thing go in the peaceful old way. In the family of the governor, Beatrice is the soul of mirth in the house, and with a spirit always cheerful, she spreads around her joy and gladness. But the central point on which all hinges, is the daughter of the house, the quiet Hero. She is her father's pride and ornament and love, compared to whom himself and everything else is thrown into the shade. With a heart tender and foreboding, she fascinates even when she is mute by the overpowering impression of her chaste, modest nature. She can practise no wanton playfulness, only at best behind the mask; she would fain not suffer the unseasonable jests of her waiting-woman; when she has played Beatrice her successful trick, she checks forbearingly every teasing word. When a

scandalous suspicion is cast in the most degrading manner against this picture of innocence, shame struggles silently within her; her fiery eyes might have burned out the errors of her accusers, but she can find no words and sinks mutely in a swoon. To the one who knows her, to Beatrice, she appears as she is, raised above all suspicion, although nothing speaks in her favour, and all witnesses and proofs testify against her. Such a being seems thoroughly justified to form the happiness and pride of a family, which consists of good, honourable, and honoured men.

Into this circle comes the royal prince of Aragon on a visit. He had been here before with his suite, Claudio had already fixed his eyes on the beautiful Hero, Benedick had already sustained a skirmish of wit with Beatrice, Borachio had already made acquaintance with Margaret. War had taken them away, upon the successful termination of which they return to spend a month in easy recreation. These also are all children in the lap of fortune. The prince is thoroughly qualified to spoil others and to be spoilt himself, to spread happiness and to enjoy it. He has a gloomy half-brother, who is a contrast in everything to all the beings whom we see around the prince; for this reason he cannot bear him; a former quarrel gave place to a reconciliation, but even now Don Pedro cares not for his brother, and strikingly gives the preference to his new favourite Claudio. He requires merry intercourse around him; a Benedick, whose humour never fails, still more a Claudio, who possesses not the sting of an evil tongue, which at times in Benedick speaks unpleasant truths, rather he needs both together, their bantering intercourse opening to him a perpetual source of amusement. He assists the one in

gaining for a wife the rich heiress Hero, and this happiness he enjoins him to seize quickly and without delay; he makes the other in love with Beatrice, and helps him over the antagonistic spirit, which might have made him aimlessly delay this happiness. Of the two Claudio is the more spoiled. An upstart, poor, and still very young, he has achieved unexpected deeds in the field, he has brought tears of joy to his old uncle in Messina by the importance he has gained, he has thus acquired the friendship of Benedick, and the favour of the prince, and the Bastard John ascribes to him all "the glory of his overthrow". In addition to this he now obtains the gentle Hero, whom he meets with a nature as virginlike and pure as hers. He bears within him that which may fill him with a just self-reliance; good fortune increases it into a sensitive self-love, even into vanity of outward advantages. Benedick asserts of him that since he was in love he could lie for nights awake, carving the fashion of a new doublet; the old Antonio calls him in anger, which exaggerates indeed, but does not invent, an ape and a fashion-monger, and Borachio when he gives Conrade an account of Claudio's deception by means of the false Hero, makes an endless far-fetched reflection upon his love of fashion, it almost seems, in order that from this outward changeableness in Claudio, he may infer changeableness of heart. At least he expressly declines the idea that this reflection of his is an undue rambling from his story.

Among these natures thus merry in their prosperity and luxury, the Bastard John now appears as their single contrast. Fortune has never smiled upon him, nor he indeed upon fortune. He is by nature of a sour temper,

melancholy and dejected, surrounded by servants of a similar character, reserved, laconic, and gloomy even at the friendly reception of his charming hosts. Incapable of concealing his feelings, he exhibits his resentment and sadness to every one, and his outward reconciliation with his brother cannot hide his unreconciled heart; he would rather be disdained of all, than "fashion a carriage to rob love from any". He is sick with envy and vexation especially with regard to Claudio, he is inclined to play him any bad trick, and ready to pay his confidential servant with heavy ducats for his help in such mischief. That the feigned reconciliation affixed on him a kind of "muzzle" dissatisfies him; it seems a necessity of his nature on all occasions, as it is of his present peculiar position, to play the part of the destroyer of peace and joy; he takes pleasure in poisoning all the joy of his friends; he feeds upon the thought of working some mischief for them. He throws himself among them, that he may cross Claudio's marriage with Hero.

The trick, by which according to the tale, the jealous fortune-forsaken man suddenly disturbs the happy repose of the rest, is followed up by Shakespeare with a second, much more premised, which gives him more scope for developing his characters. Borachio has betrayed to his master that the prince would woo Hero for Claudio at the masked ball; the Bastard convinces himself that this takes place; it seems to please him to make himself believe that the Prince is wooing for himself; he betrays the matter to Claudio, whilst he assumes the appearance of thinking he is speaking with Benedick. Claudio's unstable, credulous, changeable character, incapable of all calm reflection, is brought plainly to light on this small occasion. He knows,

every one knows the malicious spirit of the Bastard, who insinuates this suspicion of the Prince; he knows from the Prince himself, that he was to play his (Claudio's) part with Hero; yet the mere word of John is enough to make him consider his prince as convicted of breach of friendship and fidelity, to make him leave Benedick irritated and angry, and give up his Hero at once: "I wish him joy of her", he says, bitterly indeed, yet lightly, and Benedick gives him for this the taunt he deserves: — "so they sell bullocks". The disaster proves to be a delusion; it is in all parts the prelude to the real action, and Shakespeare with his accustomed profoundness has prepared us by this less important example, and has taught us to know the beings, who subsequently treat a more significant matter with the same credulity and carelessness, and disregard even the previous warning. Through the failure of the first innocent trick, John is at once provoked to a second of a more dangerous character. The incredible calumny of Hero is whispered by the Bastard to the Prince and Claudio. The Prince himself now shows that he is of the same fickle nature. Old and new experiences with this man (John) are forgotten. From the first deception Claudio had drawn the principle, that in the affairs of love all hearts must use their own tongues and trust no agent; but he draws no lesson from it for this new emergency, that on so heavy a charge laid against a being who seemed to him like Diana, he should use his own eyes, and trust no accuser, least of all, an accuser such as this. But indeed his own eye was to be convinced by the accuser! Yet even before it comes to this proof, even in the bare idea, Claudio's proud self-love is so fearfully excited, that he can even now form the

heartless vindictive resolve, in case of conviction, to expose Hero's dishonour before the whole congregation in the church, at the marriage-altar, and the Prince inconsiderately joins with him. We see clearly that this hasty resolve directly excludes true conviction; they ought to have caught Hero in the very act, but not watch in the distance in night and fog, and take shadows for proofs. It has been blamed as a fault of composition in Shakespeare, that Claudio should have stood so near and have heard so distinctly, and yet have been implicated in such a mistake; but this is only a well-founded fault of character in Claudio. The poet has allowed even Borachio to reproach Claudio, that he had let his very eyes be deceived; he permits the simple watchmen to bring to light that which neither "Pedro's nor Claudio's wisdoms could discover"; they, the careless sleepers, have caught Borachio in the *word*, when he only related his deceit to Conrade, but the others catch him not in the *deed*, when he accomplished it, though all their own and Hero's honour were at stake. The cruel design of the public separation is now executed; the unready inexperienced Claudio resigns his Hero with bleeding heart indeed, but he is blind to the proofs of her innocence in her former and present behaviour; his firm conviction of her guilt perplexes even her own father. Leonato, grown negligent like the others from prosperity, has received previous to the marriage a notification of the apprehension of the offenders, whose examination was wished for on that same morning; he left it to others. Now when the fearful calamity overtakes him, it finds him devoid of self-command and utterly unfortified; he wishes Hero dead, he would strike at her life, even he, without inquiring of any, or even, like friar Francis, noting

the lady; he rejects with violence every consolation and patience. They agree to declare the calumniated Hero dead, that this may perhaps influence Claudio; but the passionate father destroys the effect of this himself, when he publishes Hero's death to the nobles with a challenge. And the old brother Antonio, he with the "wagging head", who had just been reproaching Leonato with his childish excitement, is seized in the same moment with the same unrestrained pride of family, rising against the disgraceful injury; a moment before he was acting the consoling philosopher, and suddenly like a raging boar he bursts forth, and will risk even *his* frail life against the young and powerful offenders. Upon neither does the proclaimed death of Hero produce the effect, which friar Francis had wisely intended. He had calculated in this deception upon Claudio's changeableness. "It so falls out", he says,

"That what we have we prize not to the worth,
Whiles we enjoy it; but being lack'd and lost,
Why, then we rack the value".

But so certainly as the tidings were conveyed to him, Leonato added only a fresh ado about nothing; he brought Claudio's feelings into war with his self-love, and with the better part of this, his sense of his honour and dignity. The intelligence thus lost its salutary sting. The old frivolity continues to play its part all the more undisturbed. Both friends would fain get rid of the troublesome scene with the old men as quickly as possible; they fall at once into a jesting tone, which makes it difficult to Benedick to introduce his serious business; they encourage him by his wit to "beat away" their melancholy which is not deeply seated, his challenge surprises them not, but it only

calls forth Claudio's bitterness and irritability, in which his frivolity and changeableness are exhibited afresh. Again he asks not for explanation or reason, he perceives not Benedick's inward struggle, he angrily accepts the challenge. As he had renounced at once the Prince, his patron at the masked ball, and his beloved one at the midnight farce, he now acts the same with his friend. Only when they hear of John's flight, does the Prince become perplexed and serious, and when the deception is now cleared up, Hero returns with all her former loveliness before Claudio's soul; now when the guilt falls on him alone, his sense of honour appears in the noblest point of view. As he avenged *his own* wounded honour relentlessly against the house of Leonato, he now avenges relentlessly on himself the family-injury which he has inflicted, while he submits readily to every condition and compensation.

The poet has with extraordinary skill so arranged and placed the tragic incident, that the painful impression, which is perhaps too sensible in the reading, is lost sight of in the acting. He omitted upon the stage the scene of Claudio's agitation on over-hearing Hero, that he might thus avoid the gloom, and not weaken the comic scene in which a trap is laid for the listening Beatrice. The burlesque scenes of the constables, whose relation to the main action we have intimated, are introduced with the preparatives to the tragic events, that they may afford a counter-balance to them, and prevent them from having too lively an effect on the spectator. But above all, we are already aware that the authors of the deception are in custody before Hero's disgrace in the church takes place; we know, therefore, that all the ado about her crime and death is for nothing. This tact of

the poet in the structure of his comedy corresponds with that in the design of Claudio's character, and in the unusually happy contrast which he has presented to him in Benedick. With regard to Claudio's character, Shakespeare has so blended the elements in this nature, he has given such a good foundation of honour and self-reliance to his unstable mind and fickle youth, that we cannot, with all our disapprobation of his conduct, be doubtful as to his character. Changeable as he is, he continues stable in no choice of friends and loved ones, since he had never continuously tested them; at the slightest convulsion of events, he is overpowered by first impressions, and he is without the strength of will to search to the bottom of things. This would be an odious and despicable character, if the changeableness were not tempered by the excitability of a tender feeling of honour. Our interest in Claudio is secured by this blending of the moral elements in his nature; but the foundation for a comedy and for a comic character appears to lie neither in him nor in the whole action, in which Claudio is implicated. If we separate it from the rest, we shall retain a painful and not a cheerful impression. The poet has thus added the connection between Benedick and Beatrice, in order to produce a merry counterbalance to the more serious and primary element of the play, and to make the former predominate. The same self-love, the same spoiling by prosperity, falls to the lot of these two characters as it did to Claudio. But instead of his changeableness, we see in them only what, with a fine distinction, we should (with Benedick) call giddiness. We connect the idea of changeableness with a continual wavering after resolutions taken; that of giddiness, with unstable opinions and inclinations before

the same; changeableness manifests itself in actions, it is productive of pernicious consequences, and for this reason causes contempt and hatred; giddiness manifests itself only in contrary processes of the mind, which are by nature of a harmless kind, and this is the reason why it offers excellent material for comedy. Few characters, therefore, on the stage have such truly comic power as these two, Benedick and Beatrice, who have not lost their popularity in England even to the present day. Shakespeare's contemporary Leonard Digges speaks of them together with Falstaff and Malvolio as the favourites of the public of that day, who filled pit, gallery, and boxes in a moment, while Ben Jonson's comedies frequently did not pay for fire and door-keeper. And not long ago we could see *Much Ado about Nothing* performed in the Princess's theatre in London, the two principal parts executed comparatively well by players, who perhaps possessed no extraordinary gifts, but who had mutual pleasure in their acting, whose acting was, as in the piece itself, a struggle and a contest, as it used to be formerly in the representation of these characters by Garrick and Mrs. Pritchard.

To understand the characters of Benedick and Beatrice accurately, demands the attentive examination of every word and hint which the poet abundantly furnishes. The Prince in serious discourse speaks of Benedick as of a noble strain, of approved valour, and confirmed honesty. We find him, when we can observe his actions, true and sincere to the Prince, when he too thinks him faithless to Claudio; and in the case of Hero he is less fickle than the two other friends; he is the only one who thinks at once of a trick on the part of Prince John. Of unquenchable humour, of an

indomitable passion for raillery and provocation, he is like all Shakespeare's humourists averse to all sentimentality and enthusiasm, a ridiculer of poetry and love. If we listen to his teasing enemy Beatrice, we have to do with an inconstant man, who changes his friendships like a fashion, with a cowardly boaster but a brave eater, with a self-sufficient chatterer, a jester who misuses his wit for calumniation, and who is melancholy from vanity if his jokes are not laughed at. Nothing of this slander seriously affects him but the nick-name of jester; perplexed and wounded, he takes counsel with himself as to whether his merry vein had really procured him this title. Pride of intellect is the strong point of his self-love, which is as powerful in him as in Claudio; this appears in him and becomes excitable and sensitive as soon as he is seriously reproached. It is exhibited also in the vitiated taste which he displays when speaking of his relation to the other sex. He imagines himself to be in favour with all women, but none is right to him; she who is to attract him, must unite all conceivable graces in herself. But while he believes in all the good qualities of women, he believes not in their fidelity; mistrust is one source of his averseness to the marriage, into which he has more and more reasoned himself. From this conviction of the changeableness of women and from vanity, he has forced himself, as Claudio says, not without constraint, into the part of an obstinate heretic in the contempt of beauty; he openly displays this contempt; he offers a wager, and challenges the most unsparing wit against himself, if he should ever marry.

For a being of Beatrice's sharp wit, this attitude which Benedick assumes against her sex, presents a twofold chal-

lenge of an opposite kind: namely, to chastise him for his arrogance and to inspire him with a better opinion. According to the serious judgment of those who know her, she is endowed with unquestionable mental and moral excellence, but this is concealed under the veil of constant gaiety. She was born, as she says, under a dancing star, only created to "speak all mirth and no matter", she makes a point of keeping her heart on "the windy side of care", of removing every unpleasant impression far from her; there is little of the melancholy element in her; she is never sad, but when she sleeps; and not even sad then; she awakes laughing over dreams full of wild tricks. Those around her like to see her only in her cheerful animated behaviour; her jests to her friends are of a friendly character, and when she fears to wound, she begs forgiveness for her boldness. If we listen indeed to what Benedick says of her, she is a bad and dangerous woman, an "Até in good apparel", a Fury and a Harpy, whose absence makes hell quiet, whose tongue is as quick as it is poisonous. And so far these invectives are true: she is superior to Benedick in rapid striking wit; she possesses with the utmost quickness of the tongue that also of the eye, the keenest observation; and a self-love similar to that of Benedick, a pride in her own talents, tempts her to make sometimes a dangerous use of them. Like him she is touched and easily affected, when serious blame meets her; those indeed, who relentlessly lash the bad points of all men, would not have discovered hers. She has the same nice taste with respect to men, that Benedick has with respect to women; she has laughed away a succession of suitors; the young and the old, the talkative and the silent, satisfy her not. With Benedick

besides she is irresistibly provoked to punish his contempt of women with greater contempt of men, his wit with wit more rude, more offensive. She declares herself agreed with him in that point, that she may form all the more striking contrast to him. She acts the sworn vestal, who delights to lead her apes to the gates of hell and to be happy with maidens in heaven; she would rather hear anything than a man's protestations of love; wooing, wedding, and repenting, she sees following each other in necessary succession; and in the same spirit of contradiction she swears to her uncle, that she will never take a husband.

This proud, presumptuous, self-conceited contempt of both for each other and for the whole sex, is presently to be caught in a clumsy trap, and to have a comic fall. The net, placed for them by their friends, is simple indeed, but well calculated for the characters, and for the relation in which they are placed. They are both self-loving, and fastidious from self-love, and from both causes they have fallen into a contempt for the whole other sex and into an exclusive regard for one exception, who defies this very self-love. This exaggerated condition necessitates the overturning of so obstinate an aversion as they avow. For in their innermost soul neither of the two has renounced all love. When Benedick reflects upon it by himself, he considers certainly Claudio's desertion and variableness in this respect as very laughable, but he by no means promises that in an extraordinary case, the same may not happen to him. In favour with all women, as he believes, only not with Beatrice, this alone is stimulus enough, to draw his attention to her; he finds her besides from the very first more beautiful than the little Hero. Both are

in their merry nature and jesting qualities far too exclusively thrown upon each other, for their bantering war not to have in it an element of peace and a germ of love. For Beatrice is on her side just as little wholly unattracted by the charms of love and marriage. How pleasurable the interest she takes in the happiness of Hero and Claudio! With what gentle teasing she turns back three times to the bridal pair and wishes them joy! How the sigh escapes her in the midst, that *she* may sit in a corner, and cry, heigh ho! for a husband! She has already pondered over the moderation, that must take place in Benedick's nature, if he is to please her, when she wishes that in his talkativeness he had half the melancholy and half the silence of Prince John. In the introductory scene she enquires quite urgently of the messenger after all his bad qualities, that she may hear his good ones, and afterwards she confesses to us, that she knows his worth not merely through report. She has done that indeed earlier, which she does later, she "trans-shapes" his virtues and then sighs that he is the properest man in Italy. Similarly as they are formed in nature and mind, a similar delight in each other has half drawn them together, but their spirit of contradiction holds them apart and threatens to divide them for ever. At the maskèd ball they mutually fall into the doubting conviction, that they have seriously a bad opinion of each other. She believes that he has spoken evil of her, she is irritated, that he said she had her good wit out of the *Hundred merry tales*; he, on his side is out of humour, because she has called him the prince's jester. Immediately upon this disagreement follows the plot of the friends to make them fall in love with each other. The

plan is founded on the self-love of both. To each of the two they first speak his own praise, and then urge the worth of the other; before each they declare the world's blame of their pride, and by this they infinitely flatter the pride of each, that such a praise-worthy being, one so difficult to conquer, so froward even in defeat, should lie at his feet.

This flattered self-love is the bait, by which both allow themselves inconsiderately to be caught. They acknowledge their pride and their repulsive manner, and resolve without the slightest scruple to heal the sufferings of the other and to requite the love. He only calls to mind his giddiness, which he expressly acknowledges at the end of the piece, and the raillery, which threatens him from his friends at this change of resolution; this opposition does not occur at all to the more sensible, more deeply affected woman. Both are still further confirmed in the belief of their mutual love by the plotters, who in their conversation incidentally discover somewhat of that which should be a secret to both. "I know who loves him", says Claudio to Benedick, and Margaret rallies Beatrice stingingly upon her admirer; both must look upon this as a fresh confirmation of that, which they think they have learned by sily listening. She is now sick at heart; she has dropped her wit and Margaret brings it forward against her; she involuntarily sighs her *heigh ho!* after the man of her heart. Benedick on the other hand becomes more silent; he feigns tooth-ache, to escape the derision of his malicious friends; he appears on the scene in more careful attire, just as he had before teasingly remarked of Claudio; when they banter him upon his brushed hat and his smell of musk, they snatch

away his hat and handkerchief to examine them, while he stands comically defenceless before the wit of the unsparing mockers, abandoned to his just punishment. With all this change, it would have been difficult to the two lovers in the midst of their hostile raillery to have come to a serious explanation; the concluding scene itself proves this, after events have led to this explanation. This is brought about by the heartless scene, which Claudio prepares for Hero in the church. The better nature of Beatrice bursts forth to light amid this base ill-treatment. Her true love for Hero, her deep conviction of her innocence, her anger at the designed malice of her public dishonour, stir up her whole soul and convert it into a perfect contrast to that, which we have seen in her hitherto. This scene possesses infinite effect, when performed without the least caricature, displaying these acutely sensitive natures in all their agitation of feeling, yet without falling into a sentimental tone, of which they are incapable. Sorrow for Hero and for the honour of her house makes Beatrice gentle, tender, and weakened into tears; this "happy hour" facilitates their serious confession to both. But at the same time this hour of misfortune tests these beings, accustomed as they are only to jest and raillery, by a heavy trial, in the sustaining of which we are convinced that these gifted natures are not devoid of that seriousness of life, which passes over no earnest situation with frivolity. This endowment we would rather have imputed to Claudio, but it exists far more in the humorous couple who had not taken life so lightly, and had at least accustomed themselves to truth. Beatrice brings Benedick into the cruel choice between her esteem and love and his connection with his friend. His great confidence in her, in

her unshaken confidence in Hero, lead him to make his difficult decision, in which he acts with vigour and prudence, quite otherwise to Claudio in his difficulties: Beatrice, the untamed colt, learns at the same time, how the most masculine woman cannot dispense with assistance in certain cases; she has at the same time seen her Benedick in a position, in which he answers to her ideal of a man, in whom mirth and seriousness should be justly blended. Even Schlegel considered this well-conceived, that Shakespeare in order to prevent these friends of mirth from being confounded with jesters by profession, brought them to a point upon which they understood no trifling. The whole course of this mischance, as it affected in its results even this merry couple, has in it somewhat strikingly analogous with the close of *Love's Labour's Lost*. There, Rosaline tests the mocker Biron in consequence of the exhortation of fate, here, fate itself tests both and finds them prepared for a serious course of life. Benedick goes off the stage with a confession of his giddiness, but it is a giddiness overcome, and we have no reason to be anxious either for the constancy or peaceableness of this pair. The poet has bestowed upon them two names of happy augury.

Not every reader of the piece has regarded it thus. Mrs. Jameson was inclined to stake little hope upon the domestic peace of these warlike wooers; Campbell went so far as to call Beatrice an odious woman. We will not specially enter into an examination of these expressions, but only connect with them two general observations which will be here in place. With respect to the value of Shakespeare's humorous characters in themselves, we must not be led astray by the

excellence and readiness of their wit and intellectual powers, to draw a conclusion from these as to their moral and general estimation in the eye of the poet himself. We have already had too frequent occasion to make this remark, for us to wish to dwell upon it here. But for the comic characters throughout, it is well, if once for all, we hold that we move amongst them in a kind of society in which Shakespeare has never introduced traits of a profound nature or of powerful passions. Great and exalted virtues and heavy crimes are in general excluded from this soil, unless in the plays which we, according to our distinction, would rather call dramas (*Schauspiele*) than comedies, such as the Merchant of Venice, Cymbeline, and Measure for Measure. In the comedies, it is only faults and excellencies of a lighter kind, which disfigure and distinguish the beings, and the highest excellence which rests here on the most conspicuous characters, will ever be only of a comparative value. The tragic struggle with vast passions, the shock against the dark powers which guide the destinies of man, the deeds of unwonted sacrifice and strength of will, these are not here to be found; they would destroy the character of the comedy, which is levelled against the weaknesses of human nature, and which, therefore, moves in the usual track of social intercourse, among men of an ordinary mould. If in this point of view we see in Beatrice and Benedick more realistic natures, (not to be compared, it must be admitted, with Petruchio and Katharine, but on the other hand not even bearing the ideal colouring of Rosalind and Orlando,) we are in the right. Only in Shakespeare's spirit we must not despise this ruder realistic nature; in his spirit also we must just as little overrate it.

If with regard to Beatrice and the women of this sort in Shakespeare, we would wish to fathom the poet's own estimation, by close consideration we should easily arrive at the conclusion, that at different periods of his life, this varied perhaps with himself. We have before drawn attention to the fact that in the plays belonging to Shakespeare's early period, there is a remarkable preponderance of bad women; the poet's own experience appeared at that time, to have inspired him with no advantageous opinion of the female sex. In the second period another type of female character prevails. We shall not mistake a certain family-resemblance between Silvia in the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Rosaline and her companions, Portia and Nerissa, Rosalind and Beatrice. All of these possess in different degrees that vein of wit which makes them mistresses of conversation, which, however modest the heart may be, often permits the tongue to speak immodestly; they have almost all a preponderating development of the understanding, of the intellectual powers, often too of those of the will, a development which at times seems to step beyond the limits of the feminine nature. They have all more or less something of unwomanly forwardness in their nature, something of domineering superiority; and therefore the men in contact with them play more or less a subordinate, lesser part, or at any rate have trouble in making themselves a match for the women of their choice.

Shakespeare must at that time in London, in the wider circle of his acquaintance, in his contact with the higher classes, have become intimate with women, who withdrew him suddenly from his former ill-humour with the sex into

a devoted admiration of them. In his Portia he has depicted an ideal of womanhood, bordering on perfection, which allows no man to surpass her in strength of will and self-mastery, in mind and circumspection. In his later works, Shakespeare has rather dropped this kind of feminine ideal. A still deeper intimacy with woman's nature made him at last tarry with greater delight on the feeling side of the womanly character, and he designed then in those few touches the tender beings, who persevere rather in the sphere of instinctive life which is assigned to the woman, who avoid immodest words as well as actions, who are devoid of intellectual superiority, but possess in the purity of their feelings a far more certain power, than those former favourites of Shakespeare in their wit. In that earlier period, Shakespeare would hardly have expressed with emphasis as in *Lear*, that "a voice ever soft, gentle, and low was an excellent thing in woman". He has indeed in that period depicted already those figures of a retired feminine modesty, the characters of a Bianca, a Hero, and a Julia in the two *Gentlemen of Verona*, but he has kept them much in the back-ground; his Juliet in *Romeo* stands in a just medium between the two classes of female characters, which we here distinguish in Shakespeare's plays. But later he placed his Viola, Desdemona, Perdita, Ophelia, Cordelia, Miranda, in the foreground of the scenes, and that most charming of all, Imogen, he raised even above the highly sustained ideal of Portia. In this manner Shakespeare's knowledge of the female sex became more and more refined, and his female characters rise in inner value and in moral beauty in the same degree as they have lost in outer splendour and in intellectual acuteness. But to which class

of women Shakespeare adjudged the higher value, we infer easily from this one fact, that he restricted the former to his comedies alone, and gave the preference to the latter in his tragedies, in which the profoundest side of human nature in both sexes first comes in question.

TWELFTH-NIGHT
OR
WHAT YOU WILL.

“What you Will” was performed on the 2nd February, 1602, as we learn from the diary of the barrister Manningham, who assisted at the representation, and who was struck with the similarity of the piece to Plautus’ *Menæchmi* and an Italian play *Gl’Inganni*. The sources which Shakespeare may have had before him, are in the first place these very *inganni*, a comedy performed in 1547, and printed in 1582. Then Bandello’s tale (II. 36.) “the Twins”, and another Italian comedy several times published, *Gl’Ingannati* (comedia degli Academici intronati di Siena) which is an alteration of the “Engaños” of the Spanish poet Lope de Rueda, a piece which is executed more faithfully after Bandello’s novel. Besides these, in Barnaby Rich’s *Farewell to Military Profession*, 1581, there is a tale of Apollonius and Silla, which treats the same subject, the connection of the four lovers. It is hard to say to which of these sources Shakespeare is more indebted, as he in truth stands equally far from all, and so far, that we may leave the connection of his comedy with them wholly unexamined.

The comic elements are entirely Shakespeare's own; the love-affairs are treated in those tales and comedies so superficially, so coarsely, so dissimilarly in every way, that only the bare externals of the plot may have given the poet a mere suggestion: that circle of changing affinities between the duke who loves the countess, and the countess who loves the page, and the page who loves the duke, until the brother of the page steps between, and the difficulties depart. Even in this circumstance, the errors which arise from the similarity of the twins Sebastian and Viola, and which call to mind the *Menæchmi*, are Shakespeare's addition. By this addition the scene acquires greater extent, it connects the main action with the occurrences between Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, the intricacy and liveliness is increased, the wholly unexpected conclusion, the surprising and exciting catastrophe is gained by it, and this contracts peculiarly with the quiet issue of *As you Like it*.

However successfully the plot is woven out of these complexities, no importance is laid upon it, as is the case in all Shakespeare's more finished works. The progress of the poet compared to the time when he executed the *Comedy of Errors*, may be established here by a tangible instance. That was truly a comedy of intrigue; how much unnaturalness was comprehended in this mere definition, to how many improbabilities the writer was exposed, we have already indicated in our discussion of the piece. Shakespeare has here avoided this. The similarity of the twins pre-supposed, the possibility of the mistake is accounted for by the fact, that Viola intentionally has put on the same dress as her brother; the probability of the meeting is a matter of course, as both, after they have

suffered shipwreck, would from their station and acquaintance seek safety at the court of inhospitable Illyria. The unnaturalness of the seeking brother not being reminded at the first mistake of the one sought, is here quite avoided. As soon as at the first strange meeting, Antonio utters the name of Sebastian before Viola, she conceives a hope of her brother's life, and guesses the state of things, which she cannot at the moment explain. But even by this, the possibility of longer deception is cut off, and the plot loses the significance which would otherwise be given to it. The matter in question in this play as in all others is not the plot, the outward web of the action, but the actors and their nature and motives, it is not the effect, but the cause and the agencies. Examining into these, the resemblance of the story with that of the Comedy of Errors is at once wholly lost sight of, and we discover rather an affinity between this piece and Love's Labour's Lost, where the importance of the plot was so small, and so remarkable a stress was laid upon the motives for action.

The narrative, which lay next at hand for Shakespeare among the various, above-named sources, is that by Rich; that the poet was acquainted with his book, is asserted also by the recent editor of it in the writings of the Shakespeare society. In the introduction to the tale of Apollonius and Silla, a very apt reflection is premised, which may perhaps guide us to the intention of our present piece, and point out to us the leading idea from which the poet worked. "There is no child", it there says, "that is born into this wretched world, but before it doth suck the mother's milk, it taketh first a sup of the cup of error. In all other things, wherein we shew ourselves to be most drunken with this poisoned

cup, it is in our actions of love; for the lover is so estranged from that is right, and wandereth so wide from the bounds of reason, that he is not able to deem white from black, good from bad. If a question might be asked, what is the ground indeed of reasonable love, whereby the knot is knit of true and perfect friendship, I think those that be wise would answer — desert: for to love them that hate us, to follow them that fly from us, to fawn on them that frown on us, to carry favour with them that disdain us, to be glad to please them that care not how they offend us, who will not confess this to be an erroneous love, neither grounded upon wit nor reason? Wherefore in this historie following, you shall see Dame Error play her part with a leash of lovers, a male and two females." Here then in the sense of the passage which we quoted before from Thomas Heywood, love in itself, love at least without desert would be represented as a folly; the lovers would, as we say, have made fools of themselves, the Duke to Olivia, Olivia to Viola, Viola to the Duke, without meeting with a return. But this would then be again only an intrigue, a love-affair, a situation, which in Shakespeare's eyes, in order to have a poetic attraction, must first have a psychological foundation. His first enquiry was as to the kind of nature both of the beings and of the love, which could possibly and probably have fallen into the foolish error of a hopeless passion; to this enquiry he found no sort of answer in his authorities; the answer, which *he* gave to it in his play, explains it to us on all points!

As in *Love's Labour's Lost*, so in *What you Will*, two different strata of society are represented, characters of a more refined organization and caricatures, in which the vices of human nature grow as luxuriantly as weeds. Just

as there, starting from glaring sketches of this sort, we more readily found the key to the less obvious characters of the nobler personages, so is it also the case here; these characters are Shakespeare's addition, and precisely in them must he all the more distinctly indicate the reason, for which he added them, and with respect to which he brought them to bear on the original part of the story. In the centre of this lower group stands Malvolio. He is an austere puritan; his crossed garters point him out as such; to him therefore the demand, which the clown requires of him in his character of parson, is doubly wicked, that he should hold the opinions of Pythagoras on the transmigration of souls. Pedantic, more than economical, conscientious and true, grave and sober, he is a servant suitable to Olivia's melancholy bias, to her moral severity, and to her maidenly reserve; she prefers him and he ingratiates himself into her favour, he watches an opportunity for punishing the rough youngsters, who make an alehouse of his lady's palace; he acts the talebearer and informer; his eye is everywhere; he has brought Fabian out of favour about a bear-baiting; the captain, who saved Viola, is scarcely landed, when Malvolio has him apprehended on account of a quarrel. He regards himself as far superior to the society in his mistress' house; he considers the wise men, who can be pleased with fools and their jests, no better than fools themselves; he looks down contemptuously on the "shallow things", Toby, Fabian, Maria, who persecute him with the bitterest malevolence on account of his time-serving, his affectation, and his assumed importance. He is sick of self-love, so says the countess herself to him; he is the best persuaded of himself, and thinks himself

"crammed" with excellencies ; when the countess laughingly upbraids him with his intolerable dress, he takes it for serious praise. It is his ground of faith, that all, who look on him, love him ; thus a single word from the roguish Maria has already kindled in him the idea that Olivia "affects" him. That she so strikingly rejects the Duke, may be one proof more for him, that he is more congenial to her melancholy humour. Even before Maria places the letter in his way, with which she means to make his unbounded self-conceit a "nay word", he regards himself in the prospect of the dignity of count, and loses himself in inflated fancies. After he has read the letter, he doubts no longer that Olivia commands him seriously to "cast his slough" and to abandon his servile nature. He now learns the letter by heart, and does literally what it desires of him. He regards the happiness, into the haven of which he thinks to steer in perfect security, as the direct work of the care of Jove for his highly important person, when in fact only the "shallow things", whom he considered so far beneath him, are making him run aground on the shoals of his own self-conceit. Self-love is, therefore, in this comical character also the distinguishing feature of his nature ; it has degenerated into that degree of self-conceit, which fancies itself able to master all, because it sees itself not only at the aim of perfection, but also of the happiness which belongs to this perfection. In Malvolio, therefore, this self-conceit imagines a "desert", without a shadow of reality having given cause for it, even without an emotion of his own love being called into play. Like the false love of glory in those caricatures of Holofernes and Armado, his self-conceit had instinctively grown up to such a degree,

that it knows nothing of itself, that nothing brings it to self-knowledge or improvement; the follies and caprices which spring up in him, grow into gigantic size, whether trampled down or nurtured.

The reverse to this caricature is the squire Sir Andrew. He is a melancholy picture of that which man would be without any self-love, the source indeed of so many weaknesses. To this straight-haired country squire, life consists only in eating and drinking; eating beef, he himself fears, has done harm to his wit; in fact he is stupid even to silliness, totally deprived of all passion, and thus of all self-love or self-conceit. He looks up to the awkward Sir Toby as well as to the adroit fool, as paragons of urbane manners, and seeks to copy their phraseology; he is the parrot and the utterly thoughtless echo of Sir Toby; he thinks to have everything, to be and to have been all that Sir Toby was and had; he repeats his words and imitates him, without even understanding what he says. The dissolute Sir Toby has brought him forward as a suitor for Olivia, that he may fleece him; but the poor suitor himself believes not in his success and is ever on the point of departing. He despairs of his manners, and the cold sweat stands on his brow, if his business is only with the chamber-maid. He repeats indeed after Sir Toby that he too was adored once; but we see, while he says it, by the stupid face, that on *this* point beyond any other, he is totally without experience. He has never been so conceited as to believe himself seriously regarded by any; mistrust of himself is as great in him as his mistrust of others is small. When Sir Toby seeks to persuade him and others that he is a linguist, a courtier, a musician, a dancer, and a fencer, the desire seizes him for a moment perhaps,

after his corrupter has dragged him away to drink wine against his will, to look a little at himself, but close behind this paroxysm of feeble and trifling conceit, there lurks ever a renouncing of self and a contempt of all his gifts. Scarcely can poverty of mind be more bluntly derided, than when Sir Toby asks him reproachfully, if this is "a world to hide virtues in"! Justice Shallow in *Henry IV.* had at least a vein of bragging which affects the lacking self-reliance, but Sir Andrew is at best to be compared with his cousin Slender, whose love of bear-baiting he also shares. His apathy and cowardice are all the more plainly brought to light from his quarrelsome disposition, and from the disputes into which he is led; if his Mentor Tobias had not done it, his courage would never have urged him even against the maidenlike youth, Viola; the utmost extent of his boldness towards Malvolio is to send him a challenge and then to break his word. Thus this precious man, to whom Sir Toby assigns not so much "blood as will clog the foot of a flea", is a hopeless and inconsolable wooer, not like Malvolio from self-conceit, but rather from the entire lack of all that can be called love, self-love, or reciprocal love. — Between them both in a skilfully sketched, though rather distant contrast, the poet has placed Sir Toby, who cheats his friend of his horses and ducats, whilst he decoys him with the prospect of his niece's hand. A drunkard, a coarse realist of the lowest sort, he yet possesses a slyness in seeing through the weaknesses of men, who do not lie beyond his range of vision; rough and awkward in his manners, he yet so far knows how to assume the fashions of the town, as to impose on Sir Andrew; impudent enough to make an alehouse of Olivia's palace and to take no heed when she orders him to

leave, he yet knows how to keep on good footing with the servants of the house. He has nothing of the high soaring vanity of Malvolio, but yet he looks down with blunt pride not merely upon Sir Andrew and Malvolio, but upon the clown and Olivia, and he believes himself adored by Maria, the only one whose volubility gives him the impression of superiority. However, his egotism manifests itself in that dangerous manner in which Falstaff considered inferior minds as his natural prey; he avails himself of the weaknesses of others, that he may play them deceitful or teasing tricks. In this he is seconded and surpassed by Maria, with whom he entangles himself in the common plot against Malvolio; cunningly and flatteringly she ensnares him; and the ready spider carries off the heavy fly as a prey, as her husband. The one who with his arrogance of rank, aspires higher, forfeits his chimerical hope, the other who with rude arrogance looks down upon his companions, is ensnared unexpectedly and almost without his will by a witty maiden far below his own rank, who will try her cunning hereafter in persuading him to better manners with better result during their married life than before.

Just as in *Love's Labour's Lost*, the caricatures of the burlesque part of the comedy are placed by the side of a series of characters, in whom the same fault lies concealed, which in those caricatures shot forth like a wild growth of nature into extravagant forms, a fault, indiscernible outwardly from the veil of refined cultivation, but in its nature not so dissimilar from that manifested in them; so it is in this play. Upon this same Olivia, to whom Malvolio's thoughts soar in laughable fashion, the eyes and heart of the Duke Orsino are also directed, a man,

who is so endowed with personal pretensions and excellencies, that he seems separated from Malvolio by a still greater distance, than the king of Navarre in the other piece is from Armado. Olivia herself, who turns coldly from him, considers him virtuous, noble, of stainless youth, free, learned, valiant, gracious in person, and of great estate. His mind, wholly filled with his love for Olivia, seems stirred by deep sentiments of the most sacred tenderness and truth. Sunk in melancholy, he avoids all noisy society; the chase and every other employment is a burden to him; "unstaid and skittish" in everything, he seems prompted by the desire to compensate for this variability by the firm constancy of his love. To nurture this love with the most delicate and strongest aliments, his sole business is to court the solitude of nature, and to surround himself with music. He attracts the clown from the countess' house, who with his full sounding voice sings to him songs of hopeless unrequited love. A tender poetic soul, the Duke with delicate feeling has made his favourite poetry the popular song of the spinning room, the most exquisite and simple in its touching power, that lyric art has created in the erotic style; he revels even to satiety in the enjoyment of these soft heart-felt tunes, which are like an echo to the heart. This proneness to go to extremes in his love, in his melancholy, and in all inclinations, which are congenial and in accordance with his ruling passion, is expressed in all which the Duke says and does. His desires pursue him "like fell and cruel hounds"; he loves, in the words of his messenger, "with adorations, with fertile tears, with groans that thunder love, and with sighs of fire." He himself calls his love more noble than the world; he compares it to the

insatiable sea; no other love, least of all that of a woman, is like his; he makes a show of it everywhere, by messengers, before musicians and companions, even the sailors know the history of it. But this very inclination to exaggeration induces us to look more closely into the genuineness of this most genuine love. It almost seems as if the Duke were more in love with his love, than with his mistress; as if like Romeo with Rosalind he rather speculated in thought over his fruitless passion, than felt it actually in his heart; as if his love were rather a production of his fancy than a genuine feeling. It startles us, that just that which, in a paroxysm of self-loving commendation he said of his own love compared to the love of woman, he himself contradicts in a calm thoughtful moment, when he says to Viola, that the fancies of men are more giddy than women's are, more longing, but yet more wavering, sooner lost and worn. Thus is it with his own. To give an air of importance to their love, to pride themselves and to presume upon it, this in truth is the habit or rather the bad habit of men. Viola tells him, what is just his case, that men make more words about their love, that they say more, swear more, but their shows are more than will, for they prove much in their vows, but little in their love. Olivia must feel this throughout the urgent suit of the Duke; she calls his love heresy, and turns coldly away from his seeming fervour. She sees him send to her and hears how he longs, but she sees him not bestirring himself in his own cause. She hears a claim advanced, but she finds no desert, unless it be that of higher rank; and it is this very superiority in the Duke, which she disdains. Must she not from afar have gathered from his messages even the refined conceit

of her princely suitor, with which he presumes upon his love: "it *can* give no place, it *can* bide no denay." Must she not despise this very tone of rank, in which he bids Cesario tell her, that he prizes not quantity of dirty lands and values not her fortune? Must not all this sound in her ears, as if the Duke meant that nothing might and could be lacking to him and his love, as if he grounded his pretensions rather upon his princely rank than upon the high nature of his love? In other instances she is far removed from coldness and contempt; something in the very nature of the duke must have provoked her proud disdain, and we shall feel that he indeed gave her good cause for this.

That the aim and object of desire are missed by this self-reflection of a love, by this melancholy tarrying upon an undefined yearning, by this too-tender nurture of a self-pleasing passion, and by the languid inactivity which it produces, Orsino's example shews; and the poet has not neglected to make this lesson still more forcible by a striking contrast. The fool, no less than Olivia has seen through the Duke's disease and he tells him of an excellent remedy. "I would have men of such constancy," he says, "put to sea, that their business might be everything, and their intent everywhere; for that's it, that always makes a good voyage of nothing." Thus, those natures which forgetful of all else, become absorbed in one constant affection he would drive into the very element of adventure, that they might forget their ponderings upon one intent, that they might be delivered in a natural course of life from the hard service of one idol, that that freshness might be restored to them, which permits a man even in matters of love to reach his aim more quickly and without labour, while the weak

votaries of love forfeit their end. Shakespeare has illustrated this in the young Sebastian. For he is just such a youth, free-hearted, uninjured, virgin like, who, seeking adventures with his sister, apparently without any definite object, undertook a voyage, suffered shipwreck, proved himself in the shipwreck a man of courage and hope, a man provident in peril, who being cast upon the shore, laments for his sister with the utmost tenderness, but like his sister quickly and practically embraces a plan for his immediate future, appearing throughout quick in resolve, vigorous, never weary, free in mind and action. Inoffensive, trusting to fortune and his good nature, he receives a purse from his captain, without knowing how he is to repay it; he gives a liberal present out of it to be free from a troublesome companion; unexpectedly involved in an adventure of the most strange, most magic nature, he enters into it with deliberate circumspection; drawn into the quarrel of the squires, he at one stroke gives back the blows due, and proves to Olivia that he would know how to free her from her dissolute guests. The charm exercised by a nature at once so fresh and so victorious, Olivia is not alone to experience. The poet has taken care, that the instinctive feeling of the countess should not be construed into womanly weakness; for men of strong nature entirely share it with her. The rough captain Antonio is attracted to this youth by just as blind an impulse of pleasure and love, he loiters about him, in spite of the danger to which he exposes himself in the adverse town, for his sake he takes delight in this danger, he bestows his love upon him, without retention or restraint; he himself calls it a witchcraft, which drew him to the joyous dexterous youth.

A feminine contrast to the Duke and his assuming self-conceited love is presented in Viola's unpretending modest nature and her quiet, reserved passion. From the testimony of her brother she is accounted beautiful by all, the Duke too considers her lips "smooth and rubious" as Diana's, and her soft clear maidenlike voice strikes him, when he sees her in the page's dress. "She bore a mind", says Sebastian, "which envy could but call fair". She is of her brother's harmless nature; enterprising even in misfortune, free and cheerful in spirit, quick in intelligence, when the occasion demands it; but far more conspicuous is the compass of her feeling and the quiet modesty of her most womanly nature. When, wrecked and impoverished she is driven to the inhospitable shore of Illyria, her first wish is to go to Olivia, that she might not be delivered to the world; when this appears hard to compass, she goes in man's attire to the duke, whose name she has at least heard in her father's house. Scarcely is she with him, than she wins the favour and full confidence of the tender-hearted lover; she is commissioned with his messages to Olivia; but she herself just as quickly conceives an affection for the duke; *she* herself would be his wife, and she confesses it in secret with one passing sigh. A serious hope of possessing him never occurs to her; she delivers her message with the truest feeling of duty. At the contemptuous meeting, which befalls her in Olivia's house, she might think herself justified in retiring, but she does not; from the strict command of her master she even breaks a little through the barriers of courtesy, that she may be admitted to her presence. It is indeed her wish and her interest, to see the beloved of her lover face to face. As soon as she perceives

her beauty, the playful tone in which she began her conversation, sinks into impassioned earnestness. She finds no sense in the denial of a love so suffering as the Duke's; she tells Olivia, what she would do, were *she* in the Duke's place, to allow *her* no rest:

“Make me a willow-cabin at your gate,
And call upon my soul within the house;
Write loyal cantos of contemned love,
And sing them loud even in the dead of night;
Holla your name to the reverberate hills,
And make the babbling gossip of the air
Cry out, Olivia”!

But it was just this which the Duke did *not* do towards Olivia; he *caused* songs to be sung and repeated, he made her name known through report, he led a deathlike life in retirement, but Olivia herself perceived nothing of a life in his love. And just that which Viola would have done as a man and as a lover, she herself did with respect to the Duke, not in that degree, of which she here speaks of the man, not in the noisy manner, which she assigns to men, not so urgent and aggressive, but all the more hearty and tender in silent patience. Thus she had indeed made her willow-cabin in the house where her soul dwells, but she guards it with quiet resignation and without pretension. The man who has no power over Olivia, captivates *her* heart more and more; his words affect her who hears them from him whom she knows, very differently to the influence of his messages over the distant Olivia; moreover he touches her heart far more deeply from his hopeless position, which is so analogous to her own. On the other hand, she steals gently, though disguised as a boy, into the heart of the man; in a masterly manner she knows how to speak of the

passion which torments him, and his most subtle observations meet with understanding and interpretation from her; her true devotion fascinates him all the more, the less he finds elsewhere a response to his lively feelings. But at the same time she does all that for her love, which a woman of her nature in this position ever can do. She might have gone so far in her sincerity as to discover her sex to Olivia; but to this heroism neither does her nature prompt her, nor does she allow her love to reach it; she contents herself with leaving to fate the unravelment of this knot. In the meanwhile she knows how to whisper to the duke that she shall never love wife as she does him; and in a fortunate hour she tells him, in case the secret of her disguise should ever come to light, the history of her humble adoration, before which his love must stand deeply confounded. It may sound as if she designed this with premeditated cunning. But it is not so. Orsino's words upon the premature fading of women have moved and touched her in her inmost soul; the clown sings a deeply affecting song full of death longing; and then the Duke gives her his fresh commission with fresh expressions of the superabundance of his love. Then full of emotion she tells him the history of a pretended sister, whose life was a blank; who never told her love, but let "concealment like a worm i' the bud, feed on her damask cheek"; who with pale melancholy sat "like patience on a monument, smiling at grief". Say, she asks him, "was not this love, indeed?" and then overcome by her words, she bursts forth into tears and goes. The issue of the affair needs no justification after this scene, one of the finest that Shakespeare has written. When Orsino at last goes personally to work and is rejected by Olivia, his

shallow love for her turns suddenly into hate and jealousy; he wishes to sacrifice her favourite to his revenge, and the victim offers herself readily to the knife. He now learns that Olivia is married to this favourite, and his hate passes for a moment to Viola. Now for a while this love-lacking heart is a "blank"; and then when suddenly matters are explained, the noble characters with which Viola has inscribed herself on this heart, stand forth in full splendour. The whole charm of this being can be displayed by the actress in this last scene almost alone by silent acting, while full of womanly shame she first struggles against the confession of her disguise, and is then made happy by the suit of the Duke, who from her has suddenly learnt modest love and its language.

As the central point of the whole action, Olivia stands in a less simple character among the three last sketched figures; her relation to the self-loving trait in the Duke's character, is unusually skilfully and delicately woven. As we see her at the very outset, we infer from her bearing, that she is a woman of unusual energy. She is mourning the death of her father and brother; for seven years she intends to go veiled, that she may bear the last deceased in remembrance; oppressed by melancholy, she laments in cloisterlike retirement and has abjured the company of men. The power of feeling which induces such a resolve, the strength of character which trusts to itself to carry it out, these influence her whole nature. She is an august lady of free and serious mind; not of a humour to bear the jests of a messenger, but thoroughly capable of thoughtfully receiving the significant thrusts of her fool; not sufficiently masculine to dismiss with more than words, her dissolute relatives who beset her house,

but carefully considerate of maintaining order by her puritanical steward and of ruling over her house in a prudent and sober manner. On her seal she bears the chaste Lucrece; for the sake of his virtuous zeal she holds Malvolio in honour; "my mouse of virtue" is the caressing term, which the fool confers upon her; by various traits she sustains the severely moral character which these qualities indicate; she is an enemy to all fashionable dress, to all gloss within and without; if only Viola calls herself her servant, she considers it "lowly feigning". This austere virtue might seem to be a constitutional fault. The manner in which she turns her back on the Duke's suit, allows us to infer pride and even a hardness, resting on an icy coldness; both Orsino and Viola reproach her with this. But in the bearing which she assumes towards the Duke, the principles are still to be perceived, which belong to such a character. By her frosty refusal she requites the Duke for the coldness which lies in his apparently ardent proposals; to his pride of rank she opposes an estimable pride of character, and as the main motive for her refusal, she seems to assert her resolve never to marry above her rank; not without grounds is she averse to the Duke, for she has read his heart and finds his love heresy. Nevertheless in the manner of her rejection, her just pride is blended with somewhat as unjust, as in the manner of Orsino's wooing; the words which she speaks to the Duke personally, witness to an aversion expressed with cruel severity; she has never tried to know the Duke, as Viola knows him, who cannot, therefore, understand her pride and wishes her the avenging requital of a similar contempt. This wish is immediately realized through Viola herself and through the evil enemy

that lurks in her disguise; Olivia's pride is to meet with a similar fall as that of the Duke's through her; the duke, with his artificial passion, biassed by his pride of rank, loses his object; Olivia, with her suddenly awakened affection, which in its violence subdues all her pride of character, errs for a time in hers. As soon as Viola from the depths of her innermost experience has named the steps she would take, were she in Orsino's place, this love-breathing tone strikes fire at once into Olivia's bereaved heart; the flame kindled in Viola, is transferred to her, she becomes suddenly restless and absent, enquires after the servant's parentage, fixes her eyes stedfastly upon him, sends him a ring, and invites him to come again. That she is not haughty by nature comes here suddenly to light; that she is not cold is shewn by this enkindled passion; she is even far removed from the tender, deeply feminine nature, with which Viola bears and conceals her love. Much rather with the same eagerness as that with which she had before expressed her aversion to Orsino, she now pursues this awakening passion; then as now she is overpowered by one energetic feeling which she actively follows out; far removed from bearing it patiently like Viola. Like the latter she gives vent to a fatalistic expression, as if she would suffer herself to be ruled by fate; but at the same moment, far more than Viola, she lends a hand to fate, by sending the ring after the messenger. Viola succeeds in bearing her love in painful secrecy, but Olivia is obliged to confess that "a murderous guilt shows not itself more soon than love that would seem hid". She passes from the one extreme of a somewhat intense melancholy and resignation to the other extreme of ardent

passion. That which the Duke had anticipated from the first becomes true :

"She that hath a heart of that fine frame,
To pay this debt of love but to a brother,
How will she love, when the rich golden shaft
Hath killed the flock of all affections else
That live in her".

Wit and understanding, virtue and honour, pride and self-reliance, nothing is able to master this passion in her. With open eye and ear she might have avoided the whole mistake of thus losing her heart in the wrong place. Her moral nature struggles with her love, and she enquires anxiously whether Viola thinks disadvantageously of her honour. When she is rejected, her pride rises on the side of her honour, her position, and understanding, which alike speak against her passion. "Why then, methinks", she says, collecting herself, "'tis time to smile again". Up to this point we might believe that in her love, as in the Duke's, somewhat of pride of rank was at work, and that she wooed the lowly page regardlessly, sure of success, as if she could not fail, and that she now draws back suddenly cooled, as the Duke did from her. But it is just here that we perceive that her passion is of quite another metal to that of the Duke. Even her last weapon against her overpowering feeling, her pride, is blunted; she perceives her fault, but headstrong it mocks reproof; a fiend, she confesses, like Viola, might bear her soul to hell; she reads scorn in her countenance, but she feels that it looks beautiful in her; she would even gain the disdainful youth by bribery. We see indeed that if in her bearing towards the Duke, she displayed somewhat of his pride in her character, she

now, in her impetuous passion for a servant, whom she had scarcely known, develops somewhat of the bold adventurous character of Sebastian, with whom the same good fortune brings her into contact. "Love sought is good", she says, "but given unsought, is better". The latter, Sebastian meets with in her, and she also in Sebastian; although she was conscious of having plainly sought it. It is indeed by a pure chance, interrupting the hitherto strictly psychological course, that she meets Sebastian, but the poet has excellently made use of it, in making us overlook the improbability of the circumstance. She meets him in agitation, anger, and care for his life; she believes that he too, her imagined Cesario, is in similar agitation; the quarrel with the rough fellows, it must seem to her, have called into play the more manly powerful nature which she had not hitherto perceived in him; all the more must he now please her. She finds him who was before so refractory now suddenly inclined, and this must be an intoxicating joy to her. In her "extracting frenzy", as she herself calls her condition, she forgets every other business, but never her own dignity and her noble behaviour; jealous and doubtful in her soul, she chains indissolubly to herself in the bonds of marriage her unexpectedly obtained favourite. From the lack of restraint throughout the victorious career of her love, she has yet to endure a moment of anxiety and shame, but the spectator knows already, that the palm of victory and happiness is guaranteed to this bold passion, which has fully eradicated in her all pride, the pride of opposition, and even that of rejection, provoked by rejection.

There yet remains to us to say a word upon the fool Feste, to whom the poet has in this play assigned a very

peculiar position. He appears quite out of all the action, out of the reach both of chance and of the passions which are at work throughout the piece. We could almost fancy that he was brought into the different scenes, only to act the witty entertainer, or as he calls himself, the corrupter of words, or indeed that his part was designed for a favourite singer. It is striking that in all the comedies which we have been now examining, indeed in all Shakespeare's plays of this period, in *Henry VIII.*, in *Measure for Measure*, in *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Cæsar*, the musical element appears. The Blackfriars' company may about this time have been in a fortunate connection with singers and composers; thus Rimbault has endeavoured to prove, that in *Much Ado about Nothing*, where a song is put into Balthazar's mouth, and the folio-edition of 1623, substitutes the name of the singer, Jack Wilson, for Balthazar, that this singer was no other than a well-known John Wilson, subsequently Doctor of Music at Oxford. So here, the fool appears as a singer by profession, who sings with equal skill love-songs of a merry and tragic nature, comic jigs and heart-rending canons. With all this he is a careless cheerful fellow, troubling himself about nothing, placed in the midst of the busy company, a wise fool among the foolish wise. No other of Shakespeare's fools is so conscious of his superiority as this. He says it indeed too often, and shows still oftener that his foolish wisdom is in fact no folly, that it is a mistake to call him a fool, that the cowl does not make the monk, that his brain is not so motley as his dress. The poet has not in this play brought the words and actions of the fool into relation with the one main idea of the piece, but opposed him rather to the separate characters in separate

expressions. It is in this play that that instructive passage stands, according to which the fool's difficult office demands, that he should "observe their mood on whom he jests, the quality of persons, and the time, and check at every feather that comes before his eye"; it is exactly this part which Shakespeare has made the fool here play. He is fit for anything; he lives with each after his own fashion, knowing their weaknesses, considering their nature, carefully adapted to the mood of the moment. When any one, Viola or the Duke, wishes to speak with his mistress, he knows how to beg gracefully; when he sings to the melancholy Duke, he refuses recompense; he deprecates expressly the idea of his begging being construed into covetousness. He boasts of being a good steward, but in the dissolute society of the squires he is himself also a little mad; yet not so mad as to allow even their bloody tricks to pass unpunished. He knows how to discriminate between persons as well as between time and place. With natural, fresh, free natures, such as Sebastian and Viola, he is at once on a friendly footing. On the other hand he punishes Malvolio for the contempt with which he speaks of him and his profession; he joins in playing him the trick which is to cure his self-conceit; and he tells him this with impressive warning, in case of repetition. To Sir Andrew he talks glaring nonsense which enchants him; he knows that he passes for no fox with the coarse Sir Toby, the more craftily and easily he watches Maria, as she lays her bait to the churl of "most weak *pia mater*", and he praises her as the most witty of her sex, if she can wean him from drinking. To his mistress Olivia he is faithfully devoted, as one belonging to her house; he condemns the extravagance of her incipient

melancholy; he distinctly designates the affair between her and the Duke as foolish; he promotes the connection with Viola and Sebastian. He keenly penetrates the Duke's changeable disposition, and bitinglly although goodnatureedly upbraids him with it; at the same time he tells him, as we have before mentioned, of a remedy which exactly gives a key to the inward condition of the lover's character. If the fool be cleverly played, it can, therefore, be a guide through the most important points of this comedy.

Together with the *Merry Wives of Windsor* and the *Taming of the Shrew*, *What you Will* is the purest and merriest comedy, which Shakespeare has written. In the *Comedy of Errors*, in *Love's Labour's Lost*, in *As you Like it*, in *Much Ado about Nothing*, tragic incidents interrupt the course of comedy. Here there is nothing of the kind; even the sentimental, at first somewhat elegiac connection between the lovers, takes a cheerful turn from the mistakes between Sebastian and Viola. In this manner the burlesque part of the comedy becomes conspicuous, while it goes to such an extent of excess and wantonness, that even Fabian declared, that the self-conceit of Malvolio, represented on the theatre, would appear an improbable invention, and he calls the absurdity of Sir Andrew suitable to a Carnival frolic. For *Twelfth-night*, the eve which ushers in the Carnival, the piece according to its title was intended, a season in which at that day in England, as at the present time with us, bean-kings were chosen by lot, merry court-scenes were acted in family-circles, and masquerades for the purpose were performed in the theatres. For a mad season such as this, mad jests are here presented, as it were, for choice (*What you Will*). And the piece

in truth is perfectly constituted to make a strong impression of the maddest mirth. Rightly conceived and acted by players, who even in caricature miss not the line of beauty, it has an incredible effect. The Germans indeed in the representation of such pieces, miss the English tradition, and above all the ease of movement and the absence of all artificial and affected histrionic action. In the representation of the Shakespearian comedies on the English stage even at the present day, all is in the most lively action, and every player appears as if in his simple easy nature. As no prompter suggests, the actor is compelled to possess himself of his part, so that, as it were, he lives rather than acts that which he has to perform. The protraction of the answers, the heavy lengthening of light scenes, which ought to pass on rapidly, thus ceases; the answer of the one addressed interrupts the last word of the speaker; the exit off the stage is so that the speakers pass off with the last syllable; with their departure one scene changes and a new begins; the intervals of the different acts last but a few minutes; thus such a piece passes quickly before us and carries us with it; the exact delineation of any single situation is nevertheless stamped deeply on the soul. But for this even the subordinate parts must be performed by clever actors; the players must not be a second idle; all of them, even the mute persons, even the silent spectators of the action, must suit the circumstances of the case, according to the nature of every moment. But that which in Germany almost always spoils the Shakespearian pieces, next to the lack of refinement and psychological knowledge, is the want in most actors of all natural and easy style. Their smooth, soul-less, declamatory manner, devoid of all inner

life, at once destroys these pieces, which should be performed in the tone of perfect nature and with plenty of life. Neither the agitation of the tragic, nor the emotion of the elegiac, nor the naïve seriousness of the burlesque parts of Shakespeare's works are obtained by our actors. To what melting power and sweetness may such scenes be raised as that in *Much Ado about Nothing* where Balthazar sings, and that in *Twelfth-Night* where the fool sings before Orsino; these compositions being for the most part from musicians of Handel's time or school, which often entwine a bond of the sweetest harmony around the great composer and our poet; that their effect can call forth the tenderest death-like attention, of this few actors on our own stage have scarcely an idea. But above all to act the ridiculous personages with that perfect devotion, so as to render evident that each of these characters is just as or even more occupied with himself, than the noblest creations of man placed near them, this would no one condescend to do. Each actor in such parts lays just so much irony in his acting as he thinks necessary to exhibit the superiority of his wisdom over the folly which he is to represent, and sufficient to ruin his acting, his character, and the piece.

IV. SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS.

We stand at the close of the second period of Shakespeare's writings, and survey the three-fold series of pieces which belong to it. An abundance of poetic reflections, of moral ideas and truths, meets us in these works, which has at all times fascinated us to these poems; but in the manner, in which *we* have considered and grouped them, they seem to bring the poet himself personally somewhat nearer to us. We could not fail to perceive, that there was manifold harmony in the design that originated these pieces, that here and there the same ethical idea penetrated, however different were the subjects. Several characters appeared to us as inner transcripts of the poet; various opinions, truths, and situations, treated with especial emphasis, seem to remind us of the poet's own experiences. We stated before at the commencement of this second period, that after a survey of the works belonging to it, we would return to the history of Shakespeare's life, and search if possibly we might discover a spiritual thread, by which to trace a connection between the poems and the poet's life. If such a relation exists, it can alone be sought for in Shakespeare's sonnets, for they are his only

productions, which afford us an immediate glance into his own inward life. It is, therefore, incumbent upon us, before we take a view of the further fortunes of the poet's life, to cast a glance upon this series of poems.

Shakespeare's sonnets are occasional poems, which were not originally intended for publication. The first mention of them is in Meres' *Wits' Treasury* in 1598. He designates them entirely as private poems, calling them "Shakespeare's sugred Sonnets among his private friends", over which "the sweete wittie soule of Ovid" had passed. Immediately after this commendation, and it seems, allured by it, a bookseller W. Jaggard hunted out these sonnets and published in 1599 under the title of "the Passionate Pilgrim" a collection of short miscellaneous poems, among which were some notoriously by other poets; some sonnets out of *Love's Labour's Lost* were inserted; two others upon the theme of *Venus and Adonis* might easily have been suggested by Shakespeare's poem on this subject and have been composed by another; only two sonnets of that series of private poems amongst his friends did the piratical publisher succeed in capturing. On this account it may be concluded, these poems were carefully kept secret; perhaps also, because there were no other sonnets of Shakespeare than the collection, which was subsequently published in a more complete form. They appeared at the same time with the supplementary poem of "the Lover's Complaint", 1609, under the title: "Shakespeare's Sonnets. Never before Imprinted." A mysterious obscurity surrounds even now this manifestly legitimate edition. It has the appearance of not being published by the poet himself. Contrary to all custom, the publisher T. T. (Thomas Thorpe) wrote a

dedication to them, and this indeed to an unknown individual, designated only by the initials Mr. W. H., whom he styles "the onlie begetter of these sonnets", and to whom he wishes "all happinesse and that eternitie promised by our ever-living poet."

The sonnets of Shakespeare, from the mystery in which they were veiled with respect to this "begetter", and from the obscurity of their whole purport, have ever been a perplexity to the interpreter and biographer; in that which alone is clear and distinct in this purport, they were a perplexity to the admirers of the poet. The first 126 Sonnets in the collection are addressed to a friend, the last 28, the contents of which we have before characterized, bespeak that relation with a light-minded woman, which was an outrage to all those who would see no defect in the poet. But even the greater part, it was believed here and there, must be interpreted to the disadvantage of the poet. With such blind prejudice were these poems long read, that as late as Malone's time, they all, even the first 126, were believed to have been addressed to a woman! Yet when it had happily been already made out, that they were intended for a male friend, Chalmers came with his "Apology for the believers in the Shakespeare papers", in 1797, and explained that the person to whom they were addressed, was queen Elizabeth! When at length it was established, (a fact at the outset impossible to be mistaken), that the sonnets were written to a young friend, the enthusiastic and amorous style awakened a severe suspicion, from which even other poets of the time were not free. It belonged to the superabundant style of this Italian school of poetry, as it did to the complimentary character of the age, that an

unmeasured expression of flattery and of tenderness, was the peculiarity of all writers of that day, of all clients of noble art-patrons from Naples to London. Shakespeare in the dedication of his *Lucrece* to the Earl of Southampton speaks of "the love without end" which he devoted to him; Ben Jonson subscribes himself to Dr. Donne as his "true lover"; Shakespeare also in his sonnets calls his favourite young friend, his "lovely boy". This in the style of the age was not ensnaring, although the age itself did not always thus regard it. Barnfield in his *Passionate Shepherd* (1595) bewails in a series of sonnets his love for a beautiful youth; it was an innocent imitation of one of Virgil's *Eclogues*; but the same construction was put upon it, as upon Shakespeare's sonnets. On closer consideration all this fell to pieces of itself. But the uncertainty still prevailed as to the youth who won from Shakespeare this extraordinarily deep affection or this shallow pompous flattery. It availed nothing when some interpreters proposed, that the sonnets should be regarded as if they were merely addressed to a creature of the imagination, as if they were fictions of the fancy, as if they had been written in the name of other friends; they must indeed have had scarcely a presentiment of the nature of this realistic poet, seriously to believe he had used his pen thus dipped in his own heart's blood in the hire of another, or could ever with his free choice have suffered his art to lose itself in so strange a fiction of that strangest connection which these sonnets depict. For where the subjects are distinct, where profound reflections and feelings occupy the poet, what in all the world could have induced him to utter these emotions of his soul in the form of amorous outpourings to a friend,

if such a friend were not truly and bodily at his side, sharing his inner life? We are too much accustomed to see this form of sonnet only employed in the idle play of forced fancy among spiritualistic poets. But if the Shakespeare sonnets are really to be distinguished above others, they are so only in so far and because a warm life lies within them, because actual circumstances of life appear, even under the pale colouring of this form of poetry, because the full pulsation of a deeply excited heart penetrates the thick veil of poetic formalism.

It is clear that the sonnets are addressed only to one and the same youth; even the last 28 sonnets to a woman relate from their purport to the one connection between Shakespeare and his young friend, and Regis in his German translations of the Sonnets has justly perceived, that these should properly be arranged with the sonnets 40—42. The sonnettist says himself that he is continually expressing one old love in a new form. The same caressing tone ever returns, even after it has been interrupted by more serious subjects of discussion; the "sweet boy" is the poet's bud and rose to the last. If we must even admit, as has been often the case, that the sonnets originated at great intervals of time, the poet has himself told us, why he continues even at a later period to ascribe in poetic fiction the bloom of youth to his friend; he would, he says in sonnet 108, "like prayers divine, each day say over the very same, - counting no old thing old"; his "eternal love" weighed not "the dust and injury of age". To this ever-loved one Shakespeare assigns beauty, birth, learning, and riches; from the most superficial reading it is evident, that he was a young man of high rank in society, whose distance

from the poet rendered it necessary, that their mutual relation should be concealed from the world. It was evidently on account of this outward incongruity, that the sonnets, when they appeared, were neither dedicated by Shakespeare himself, nor was the name of the "only begetter" designated by the publisher; indeed, we may admit with certainty, that the initials Mr. W. H. were intended to mislead. The begetter, that is the person to whom the sonnets were addressed, was evidently not a Mr. of the middle class. Collier and others, indeed, understood by the "begetter" only the *procurer*, who collected the sonnets for the publisher, yet the publisher himself in the dedication plainly designates that "begetter", as the very man to whom Shakespeare in the sonnets promised immortality through his verse. This "begetter" is necessarily the same man, whom the 38th sonnet calls in a similar sense "the tenth muse" and "the argument" which never suffers the poet to want "subject to invent"; the same man, to whom the 78th sonnet enjoins to be "most proud" of the poet's works, because their "influence is his, and born of him."

That thus the man, to whom the sonnets in the edition of 1609 are dedicated, is the man to whom they were addressed, is quite indubitable. But from the initials Mr. W. H., by which the dedication designates him, we shall scarcely guess his name, as they were evidently intended to deceive. They might have very easily been addressed to a nobleman, although the begetter is here termed a Mr.; when Collier thinks, that at that time they would have hardly ventured thus familiarly to denominate one of the nobility, he forgets again that in accordance with the contents of the sonnets and with the nature of the con-

nection, this misleading was undoubtedly intentional, and rested on an understanding with the noble Lord. And thus the doubtful begetter might even bear a name, to which the initials W. H. had no reference. If the darling of Shakespeare were, according to Drake's supposition, Henry Wriothsley, Earl of Southampton, we might believe that the initials W. H. concealed and betrayed just as much of the truth, as was intended by the dedication. That Boaden (on the Sonnets of Shakespeare. 1837) founds upon these initials his supposition, that they were intended for William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, does not on this very account meet with our favour. It is true that from the personal advantages and from the position which Pembroke occupied, he might well have been the friend and patron, to whom Shakespeare would have dedicated such sonnets. He was handsome enough for so much praise, great enough for so much distinction, he was a protector of all learning, himself a scholar, himself a poet, universally beloved and respected, an especial patron of Shakespeare's and a friend to his dramas, as may be seen from the dedication of the edition of Shakespeare's works in 1623. But from the period and the age of the Earl of Pembroke, it is not possible that the sonnets were addressed to him. He was born in 1580, consequently in the year 1598, when Meres mentions the sonnets, he was 18 years old; and it is not imaginable, that Shakespeare would have exhorted so urgently a young friend of this age to marry, as he does in the first sonnets; a supposition, which besides would oblige us to admit, that these same first sonnets were written not before 1598, and not, as is very probable, even some years earlier. Boaden is therefore obliged to add to the one improbable supposition,

a second, namely that the sonnets published in 1609 were not those mentioned by Meres! But he has here overlooked that two of our sonnets were printed by Jaggard as early as 1599, and that, when these were in being, the whole series must also have been in existence, because, taken apart from the collection, they have no meaning. Amid these doubts, Collier despaired of coming to any opinion upon the hero of these sonnets. But this appears to us to limit all conjecture too much. The supposition of Nathan Drake, that the Earl of Southampton was Shakespeare's youthful friend, upon whom he bestowed such hearty affection and reverence, rests in spite of all opposition on the part of the English Editor thus hostile to conjecture, upon such sure grounds, that we must regard all hypothesis in the light of a sin, if we will not adhere to this. The caution of the critic demands not that we should repudiate a supposition so extraordinarily probable, it requires alone, that we should not obstinately insist upon it, and set it up as an established certainty, but that we should lend a willing ear to better and surer knowledge, whenever it is offered.

The Earl of Southampton was born in the year 1573, and from 1590 resided in London. His mother's second marriage was with the Lord Treasurer Sir Thomas Heneage, whose office brought him into connection with the theatre; this may have given his step-son opportunity of gaining a taste for the works of the stage and inclination to afford them protection. He was early a patron and a passionate friend of the Drama. In a letter from Rowland White to Robert Sidney (1599), it is said, "the Lord Southampton and Lord Rutland come not to the court; they pass away

the time in London, merely in going to plays every day". At the same time he was early the patron of all scholars; the excellent Chapman calls him in his Iliad "the choice of all our country's noblest spirits"; Nash in speaking of him says: "incomprehensible is the height of his spirit, both in heroical resolution and matters of conceit." Beaumont asks, who lives on England's stage and knows him not? All poets and writers vied with each other in dedicating their works to him; taking for granted that Shakespeare addressed his sonnets to him, he says this himself in the 78th:

"So oft have I invok'd thee for my muse,
And found such fair assistance in my verse,
As every alien pen has got my use,
And under thee their poesy disperse".

Shakespeare himself in 1593, dedicated to him his *Venus and Adonis*, in a style of humble distance; in the following year, his *Lucrece* appeared with a bolder dedication, which speaks already of the "love without end", which he devotes to him, on account of which the poet feels himself assured of a good reception for his little work, not from the worth of his "untutored lines", but from "the warrant", which he has of the Earl's honourable disposition. We have before conjectured that these two descriptive poems of Shakespeare's, if they originated earlier, were yet revised for publication at this time; the character of the poetry, full of conceits and epigrams, is the same as that which prevails in most of these sonnets. In the 53rd sonnet he says:

"Describe Adonis, and the counterfeit
Is poorly imitated after you;
On Helen's cheek all art of beauty set,
And you in Grecian tires are painted new".

We should think this alludes directly to both poems; the first passage distinctly; the second almost more so. In *Lucrece*, Shakespeare has mentioned Helen in the description of a picture, and it is as if the retrospect had suggested to him the allusion: "you in Grecian tires are painted new". With respect to the purport, the image of the coy Adonis is closely connected with the substance of the first 17 sonnets, and the stanzas 27—29 of the poem are written quite in the style of these first sonnets. These are the poems, in which Shakespeare earnestly advises his young friend to marry, that he may secure to the world a copy of his beauty and excellence. In this same year 1594, when the commencement of the sonnets might easily date, as we conclude from the intimate connection between Southampton and Shakespeare which the dedication of *Lucrece* betrays, the earl paid his addresses to Elizabeth Vernon, a cousin of his friend the Earl of Essex. The Queen desired not this union, and subsequently when in 1598 or 1599 they married without her knowledge, she ordered both to be placed in confinement; this seems indeed to indicate a connection, in which we imagine such an impressive admonition, as that which Shakespeare repeats in those first 17 sonnets, would not be out of place. At that time Southampton was scarcely twenty two years old, an age, young enough to admit of Shakespeare's caressing expressions, "sweet boy" and others, and advanced enough, to allow of exhortations to marry. With respect to this connection between the Earl and Shakespeare a notice is preserved which, if it were fully proved, would testify the unusual nature of this union between two of unequal birth, in such a manner as to explain to us the entire devotion of our poet towards this youth. Rowe relates

in his life of Shakespeare, as a matter which would have been incredible to him, had it not rested on the authority of Sir William Davenant, who was well acquainted with Shakespeare's affairs; that Southampton once gave to Shakespeare the sum of a thousand pounds, a sum that according to the present value of money we may estimate at five times as much, in order to enable him "to go through with a purchase which he heard he had a mind to". It was customary to reward dedications with gifts, but not with gifts of such importance. It was at the very time of Shakespeare's two dedications, that the Blackfriars company began to build the Globe on the Bankside. In consideration of the interest which the Earl took in all that concerned the stage, and in consideration also of those dedications and of this undertaking of his favourite company, Collier considers it not improbable, that Southampton might have given this sum, partly to reward Shakespeare, partly to enable him to take a share in the new building; indeed there are none of the modern English editors, who in this money-matter do not shew themselves as credulous of the tradition, as we prefer to be in other matters which prove fruitful for the inner history of the poet's life. Moreover it well agrees with this tradition, that just at this time Shakespeare's outward circumstances assumed a better appearance, and that he could assist his father's impoverished family. At all events the connection which these different relations (between the two parties) indicate, was a most unusual one, and especially in those days quite out of rule; that connection, which concerns Shakespeare's personal contact with Southampton, as well as that to which the sonnets refer. That Shakespeare should have made several such uncommon alliances,

is certainly hard to believe. And it has, therefore, always appeared to me incomprehensible, why in England the identity of the object of these sonnets with the Earl of Southampton should be an idea so much opposed. For if ever a supposition bordered on certainty, it is this.

It has been asserted on the other hand, that no allusions to the occurrences of Southampton's life were contained in the sonnets. Here again it is forgotten, that from the purport of the sonnets themselves, and from the nature of the connection, all that which would too plainly refer to the Earl, must have been omitted. But we have reason to believe, that these sonnets were all together written, before the Earl of Southampton had had any adventures at all. His public life begins in 1597, when he made a short expedition to the Azores with the Earl of Essex. In 1601 he took part in the conspiracy of the same nobleman, his kinsman; he was thrown into prison and was only released by the death of the queen. It is not quite impossible, that more than one allusion to the expedition to the Azores is contained in the sonnets; the whole cluster of pieces, from 43—61, speak abundantly of an outward separation between the two friends, which falls heavily upon the poet. But it is more probable, that these passages refer to a less important absence of his friend, and that all the sonnets were written before 1597. Everything combines in giving a still greater certainty to this definition of the date of the sonnets, than to the conjecture relating to the person of the Earl of Southampton. We have said, that Meres mentions the sonnets; we feel ourselves obliged to regard it as a fact, that he intended *our* sonnets, because he designates them as private poems amongst Shakespeare's friends, and because

in 1599 two of the series were published, which lose their signification and import apart from the rest. The sonnets thus originated prior to 1598. Upon the question of time, one passage has been always overlooked, where in one of the later sonnets, the poet expressly says, that three years had passed, since first he had seen his friend. If we assume that this was in 1593 in the year of the dedication of *Venus and Adonis*, the latter pieces must have been written before 1597, for we believe that we shall be able to prove presently, that the sonnets in the first edition of 1609 are chronologically arranged according to an inner connection. Collier and others say indeed that the sonnets were written at very different periods, some in youth, some in more advanced age, that in some the poet speaks of his "pupil pen", in others of his age. But this rests indeed upon the carelessness of the readers. If we were to take too seriously the poet's poetical exaggerations concerning his age, they would have even no sense, if the sonnets were first written in 1608; Shakespeare was then forty-four years old. But incidentally, and this also is quite overlooked, the poet speaks of his age in one of the two sonnets, printed in Jaggard's collection, 1599; he was then only a few years past thirty! These allusions to his age can thus only be understood relatively, in comparison with the age of his young friend. And even there, no great difference appears to exist. In the 81st sonnet he says:

"Or I shall live your epitaph to make,
Or you survive when I in earth am rotten".

This indicates no great difference of age; but it agrees best with the actual difference of nine years, which existed

between Shakespeare and Southampton. It might be regarded purely as a poetic license, when the sonnettist launches forth upon his wrinkles and his autumn-time of life; thus Robert Greene in his "Farewell to Folly" 1591, says also that age is approaching, and he is speaking of his many years at a time when he was not much past thirty. We will however, not call it a mere poetic freedom. For, to a man active betimes, to a youth of fancy, who had accomplished much in his early years, who lived quickly and effectively, who understood how to measure the value of time, to him will that moment ever be a solemn one, in which he leaves the spring-tide of his first fresh youth, his twenties, and approaches the turning point of that "*mezzo del cammin di nostra vita*"; to him the first reflection upon the stealing advance of age will ever be more gloomy, than to the man who strives in the long routine of life's difficulties in our present time, to whom the twenties are years of privation and of care. In such a mood of the first seriousness of age, in such a dread of the imagination at the retrospect of the charming youth of his beloved friend, Shakespeare might well say (sonn. 73.), that for him the time had come,

"When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang".

He might say this, and no one, possessed of experience and fancy, will marvel, even if this sigh of tenderest melancholy should come from the lips of a poet of thirty years old. To all the outward grounds which we have advanced, with regard to the exact date of the sonnets, interior evidence may be added. These poems belong to the Italian period of Shakespeare's writings. They are written at the time at which

all the most famous collections of sonnets by English poets appeared: Daniel's *Delia*, 1592, from which the form of the Shakespeare sonnets is imitated; Constable's *Diana*, 1594; Spenser's *Amoretti*, 1595; Drayton's *Idea's Mirror*, 1594, and others. We have seen above, how about this time Shakespeare's taste began to change, how he bade adieu to the lyric forms of the south, how he drew closer to the national Saxon taste, and how the simple songs of the people henceforth supplied the lyric passages in his dramas which in *Love's Labour's Lost* are occupied by the sonnets. The historical pieces taken from the national annals removed him still more from the Romanic taste. To any one who has attentively read Shakespeare's poetry in chronological order, it will appear plainly impossible, that he could have written a long series of verses of this kind after 1598.

We will now endeavour to follow the inner thread, which binds together the sonnets of Shakespeare, not misled by the adversaries to this mode of explanation, some of whom must have read these poems without any attention or imagination, since they so interpreted this interpretation, as if the sonnets were regarded as an originally connected whole, as a rhyming chronicle intentionally designed upon a section of the poet's life. Others already have perceived before us (Armitage Brown, *Shakespeare's autobiographical Poems*. 1838.), that the series of these poems is divided into different groups, each of which touches on a distinct subject; but in the separation and characterizing of these groups we differ partly from the attempts of Brown. All these groups form together a single whole, a history of the poet's inner life, taking an exact psychological course full of nature and truth; the sonnets are

chronologically arranged, in order to unroll this course before us. That which makes the distinction between these groups difficult, and that which may easily mislead into denying a distinction at all, is the interruption of the sonnets relating to stated circumstances, by some of a wholly general character, which proclaim with great uniformity the praise of the friend. Throughout the whole collection these vague songs of praise are scattered, veiling the real purport of the rest, the real occasional poems. The sonnets were of course written singly, and the greater part would naturally belong to those universal poems of homage, which expressed the stationary relation between the friends, and which, from their purport, belonged not to a fixed condition or period. The poet would hardly accurately observe, in arranging them for the press, to what time they belonged; he could not place them monotonously together; he was obliged to distribute them among the groups, which exhibit the touching history of the connection. If we do not suffer ourselves to be disturbed by the insertion of these insignificant pieces, we shall find the history of that inner life distinct and expressive. One thing more besides must not mislead us; this is the form of the sonnet itself, and that which is incidental to it. Frequently has this style of poetry been attacked, and often has it been defended. If we would seek for cutting weapons of attack, we may find them in Shakespeare's sonnets. What a living picture would our poet have left behind, if, when prompted by his love, he had sung the union of soul with his sweet youth in the free forms suggested by the moment, by the nature of the circumstances, at the same time with their purport! But since he moulded all into this one square

angular form, which effaces every thing distinct and particular, which spreads a dim mist over each tangible meaning, it is perfectly conceivable, how for so long the bare actual circumstances could be misunderstood or overlooked. To this one drawback there follows another, which just as naturally attaches to this style. The want of reality in these indistinct poems was to be supplied by poetic brilliancy; the relation between means and aim, between cause and effect disappears; far-fetched thoughts, strange exaggerated images, and hyperbolic phrases mislead the understanding; profound conceits and epigrammatic fancies, sparkling for their own sake, cast the subject in question on this very account into the shade. This intensely poetic language prevents not even the repetition of matter and expression in the same monotonous form, so that the tautology is constant. And as in *Lucrece*, the poet involuntarily experienced surprise at the peculiarities of that conceit-style of the Marinists, here also in the midst of his work he acknowledges (sonn. 76.) that his verse is "barren of new pride, so far from variation or quick change", that he writes "all one, ever the same", and keeps his "invention in a noted weed". In this weed it is not easy to recognize the true and real purport; tact and comparison must teach us not to take all here too much as simple truth, and yet also not unthinkingly to lose the sure meaning.

We are of opinion with Cunningham and others, that the sonnets of our poet, æsthetically considered, have been over-estimated. With respect to their psychological tenor, they appear to us, with the total lack of all other sources for the history of Shakespeare's inner life, to be of inestimable value. They exhibit the poet to us just in the

most interesting period of his mental development, when he passed from dependent to independent art, from foreign to national taste, from subserviency and distress to prosperity and happiness, aye, even from loose morality to inner reformation. And in addition to the gigantic, hardly comprehensible picture of his mental development, which is presented to us in his dramas of this period, we here receive a small intelligible painting of his inner life, which brings us more closely to the poet himself. We live with him throughout a connection, which was probably one of the greatest events in the calm routine of his existence; we read the touching story of a full, feeling, warm heart, a story that no one can contemplate without deep emotion; we perceive the gentle undulation and the stronger current of an aspiring passion ebbing and flowing, the psychological story of which, we can follow in all its depth. We have before learned, that Shakespeare was not happy in his married life. The void, which would thus be left in his heart, seemed to be entirely filled, when he received the love of the noble youth, who from his high position extended his helpful hand to him in his lowliness and poverty, and perhaps first cast a higher intellectual light into an outwardly joyless existence. Truly the development of this connection of the poet with his "fair friend", is the detail of a strong passion, violent even to suffering, such as a man generally feels only for a woman. In England, no one until now has felt any sympathy in this history of the poet's heart. With great care they have discovered out of a hundred scattered notices, how much the poet was "worth" at the different periods of his life, but no one with true devotion has read these sources connected with the history

of his soul. Perhaps for this a more youthful people is required, a people such as the German, whose hearts are not yet hardened by exclusive attention to politics and common interests. Nay, the whole secret of our deep interest in Shakespeare seems to rest in this, — that the degree of development and culture of our nation in the present day, is nearly the same as that of England in Shakespeare's time; and that to our advantage the appearance of this great poet took us not unawares as formerly it did England, but that since that period, by the nurture of poetry through two hundred years, the soil with us has been slowly and thoroughly prepared for him.

We pass finally to the analysis of the separate groups of our sonnet-series, and following the given arrangement of the poems, we relate the history of the connection between the two friends.

Sonnets 1—17. The first seventeen sonnets urge upon the "tender churl" in a forcible, even importunate manner to marry; they call him "the world's fresh ornament", the "only herald to the gaudy spring", on whom it is enjoined as a duty to leave behind a new impress of the beautiful seal, carved by nature as a copy; and in this series we may admire the rich invention of images, with which the poet varies a theme so simple. From the 14th sonnet the subject passes gradually into the more general praise of the beauty and truth of his young friend; yet in sonnet 17, he says, in pursuance of his former theme,

"Who will believe my verse in time to come,
If it were fill'd with your most high deserts?
But were some child of yours alive that time,
You should live twice, — in it, and in my rhyme".

Nevertheless, continues sonnet 18, abandoning this theme, "thy eternal summer shall not fade". The praise of his friend was carried to a great height in these first sonnets: further on the poet recollects, as it were, that he will not continue in this exaggerated style; he will not imitate that Muse (Drayton) "stirr'd by a painted beauty to his verse"; he will not take all his ornaments from heaven, from sun and moon, from "earth and sea's rich gems", from "April's first-born flowers", and from all the rare things that "heaven's air in this huge rondure hems"; he will write truly as he loves; he will not weaken his own heart with abundance (sonnet 23.), rather, "for fear of trust", will he "forget to say the perfect ceremony of love's rite"; and his friend shall "learn to read what silent love hath writ". In fact in the following group, the elaborate form of the first series is interrupted by the expression of the most lively sentiments, while their theme is no longer of so superficial a character as that of the earlier ones, but is drawn from the soul of the poet.

Sonnets 18 — 40. The subject, which links together the second series which we point out, is the inequality of the position of the two friends. The history of their close connection begins here, for the first seventeen sonnets might have been written from a distance. Here the devotion becomes decided, with which the young nobleman surrendered himself to the poet so superior in mind, and that of the poet with which he returns this condescending friendship, by turns with modesty and self-confidence, reserve and familiarity. He must confess (sonn. 36.), that

"we two must be twain,

Although our undivided loves are one:

So shall those blots that do with me remain,

Without thy help by me be borne alone.

In our two loves there is but one respect,
 Though in our lives a separable spite,
 Which though it alter not love's sole effect,
 Yet doth it steal sweet hours from love's delight".

He may not evermore acknowledge his friend, nor may he with public kindness honour him, lest he take from his name that honour, which he would give to his friend. "But do not so;" cries the friend-poet,

"I love thee in such sort,
 As thou, being mine, mine is thy good report".

The poet will in this manner take care of his honour. Thus subsequently he desires that his friend (sonn. 71.) should not mourn for him when he is dead, but let his love decay even with his life, lest, as he says,

"The wise world should look into your moan,
 And mock you with me after I am gone".

The poet has many departed friends to deplore, but the one new friend compensates for all. Yet the sense of the cleft, which separates them both, torments him throughout, and his humility suffers him not to continue in his self-reliance. If in one place, elevated by the honouring friendship, he declares his readiness to resign all dignities of rank, elsewhere he longs after a more honourable position, that he may be more worthy of his friend. The contentment expressed in sonnet 25, where he willingly renounces honour and title for the place where he "may not remove, nor be removed", is at variance with his desire elsewhere (sonn. 26.) for a favourable star, which "puts apparel on his tattered loving, to show him worthy", that he may dare to boast how he loves his friend; till then, he will not show his head where he may be proved. This double condition

of feeling is expressed by the 29th sonnet in the most poetic and deeply affecting manner :

“ When in disgrace with fortune and men’s eyes,
 I all alone beweepe my out-cast state,
 And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
 And look upon myself, and curse my fate,
 Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
 Featur’d like him, like him with friends possess’d,
 Desiring this man’s art, and that man’s scope,
 With what I most enjoy contented least;
 Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
 Haply I think on thee, — and then my state
 (Like to the lark at break of day arising
 From sullen earth) sings hymns at heaven’s gate:
 For thy sweet love remember’d, such wealth brings,
 That then I scorn to change my state with kings”.

Sonnets 40—42. The three following sonnets, in which the poet complains of the robbery of his love, have been already anticipated in the former group by sonnets 33—35; the connection is introduced and defended in a roundabout way, which the poet himself designates as a fault. The sonnets 40—42, gently reproach the young friend for his robbery of a beloved one, whom according to the whole tone, the poet cares for but little, whom his friend on his side also, as it seems, despises, and as it seems, withdraws from only in wanton raillery. The sonnets 133 and 134. make it clear, that the same woman is here intended, as the one to whom the last group of sonnets, previously discussed, was addressed; this group ought to have been introduced here as an episode, although it was certainly expedient to remove it, in order not to interrupt the development of the connection between the two friends. The wantonness, which is alluded to, indicates from a new side in no very edifying manner, how closely the two friends were now

united. The rich man takes from the poor friend his one lamb, blemished as it might be; he forgives it in his compliant position, he finds that in the "lascivious grace" of the youth, "all ill well shows", and that these "pretty wrongs" befit his years, which are ever exposed to temptation.

Sonnets 43—61. The following series, as far as the 61st sonnet, were written during the absence of his young friend; they were temporarily separated; a "sad interim" is bewailed, though it does not "kill the spirit of love with a perpetual dulness". Even when the single pieces do not speak plainly of this theme, they yet have reference to it. It is begun in sonnets 43—45, in sonnet 46, it seems to be lost sight of, but the 47th sonnet refers both pieces again to the principal theme. Thus subsequently, the sonnets 53—55 appear to deviate, but the 56th sonnet unites the little series again to the main subject, the absence of the friend. The whole tone of these pieces expresses longing after the absent one; this friendship is strangely mingled with a jealousy, which throughout gives it a painful sting; it is as if the poet clung more earnestly in the separation to preserve the favour of his friend. How natural is it, that just in this time of absence the thought torments him, whether the man of high position, accustomed from early youth to the happy principles of equality, might not some day quite alienate himself from him. In this presentiment of a bare possibility, a timid half-expressed self-reliance on his own desert struggles with the devotion of the moment, while he yet possesses his friend. The 49th sonnet is in this respect full of expression:

"Against that time, if ever that time come,
When I shall see thee frown on my defects,

When as thy love hath cast his utmost sun,
 Call'd to that audit by advis'd respects;
 Against that time, when thou shalt strangely pass,
 And scarcely greet me with that sun, thine eye;
 When love, converted from the thing it was,
 Shall reasons find of settled gravity;
 Against that time do I ensconce me here,
 Within the knowledge of mine own desert,
 And this my hand against myself uprear,
 To guard the lawful reasons on thy part.
 To leave poor me thou hast the strength of laws,
 Since, why to love, I can allege no cause".

Sonnets 62—77. The serious mood, which has before overcome the poet, gains still more ground. The formerly often playful tone ceases; another period begins; events seem to lie between this and the earlier parts. The poet speaks much and often of his age, thoughts of decay and of the frailty of all things occupy his mind, and the glance he casts upon the eternity of his poetry seems but little to divert him. In sonnet 73, the presentiment of an early death appears; even the idea of his favourite's future age now torments him. A longing after death seizes him when he looks upon the evils of society generally, or upon those more closely connected with himself, evils that abound in the republic of letters; a disgust, which he often expresses in his dramas, takes possession of him when he observes the falsehood of the world, borrowing beauty from paint and plaited hair, the vitiated age, when beauty no longer "lived and died as flowers do now", when

"the golden tresses of the dead,
 The right of sepulchres, were shorn away,
 To live a second life on second head".

This abhorred world he now with advancing years sees his young friend enter, whom he for a delicious moment had

alone possessed; he sees him fallen into bad company; they slander the beauty of his mind according to the outward appearance; to his fair flower they add "the rank smell of weeds". Whilst he protects him from every suspicion, he blames him gently, because this contradiction between his true desert and its "show" is his own fault, as he does "common grow". The dawning jealousy of the favourite, whom now other society also claims, conceals itself under the veil of moral carefulness. It lies in the nature of this passion, that where it once has taken root, it is difficult to eradicate it. It binds the poet more and more within its fetters; we may observe the finest marks of its increase and indication, in our poetic documents. He writes in sonnet 70: —

"Slander's mark was ever yet the fair.
So thou be good, slander doth but approve
Thy worth the greater, being woo'd of time.
For canker vice the sweetest buds doth love,
And thou present'st a pure unstained prime.
Thou hast pass'd by the ambush of young days,
Either not assail'd, or victor being charg'd.

This praise, in which may lie so many reasons for delight, must be read in connection with the remaining pieces, in order that we may feel in what a painful tone it is uttered. And with this we must also compare the joyful wantonness with which in the former untroubled days, the most opposite reproaches had been made! Here he says so sadly that his friend is "not assailed" or not won, and before he spoke so playfully in those favourite verses, which we have already read in Titus and Henry VI.:

"Gentle thou art, and therefore to be won,
Beauteous thou art, therefore to be assailed".

Here how discontented: "he has passed the ambush";

there, so contented: "temptation follows him, and the pretty wrongs befit him well". A greater austerity, it must be admitted, appears in these later sonnets, and in such a manner as allows us to infer a change of mind in the poet, yet here we hear indeed still more plainly the voice of jealousy, which grudges to the world and its judgment both his friend's virtues and faults. Now he wishes, that the world could once see his pleasure, and then he counts it best to be alone with his friend; now he is "proud as an enjoyer", and anon doubting "the filching age will steal his treasure". We feel throughout that the social relations of the young nobleman change and expand, that he steps beyond the exclusive possession of the poet. The way is prepared for the following group, in which the noble patron of art appears more decidedly surrounded by other poets and literary clients.

Sonnets 78—86. There was a time when our poet alone called upon the aid of the kind patron, and when his verse alone "had all his gentle grace"; but now he laments that his "gracious numbers are decayed", and that his "sick muse doth give another place". Alien pens had got his use, and under his patron's name dispersed their poesy. He grants that his friend was never "married to his muse", but it grieves him. He ventures not to reproach his friend, if he receives the "dedicated words" of other writers, especially when he finds his worth "a limit past" the praise our poet had bestowed upon him, and therefore "enforced to seek anew some fresher stamp of the time-bettering days". Yet he commends to him his simple, "true, plain words", which by the side of the strained rhetoric of the other would retain their value. Nay, he arms himself with his proudest self-reliance and tells his friend,

“Your monument shall be my gentle verse,
Which eyes not yet created shall o'er-read;
And tongues to be, your being shall rehearse,
When all the breathers of this world are dead”.

But this self-reliance endures not the jealous emotions in the poet's heart; there is no passion which so completely casts down proud self-confidence, as a jealousy not entirely hopeless, and springing from true love. As he says in the 80th sonnet,

“O! how I faint when I of you do write,
Knowing a *better spirit* doth use your name,
And in the praise thereof spends all his might,
To make me tongue-tied, speaking of your fame”!

The modest man, as if he must still hold in honour the choice of his friend, painful as it is to him, calls himself “a worthless boat” compared to the proud, “tall building” of the new favourite. And who *was* Drayton, whom some imagine to have been this favoured one, or indeed Dee, whom others find in him! And yet it cast him down to see the approbation of his beloved bestowed upon another, and he “inhearsed” his ripe thoughts in his brain, “making their tomb the womb wherein they grew”. His self-reliance whispers to him yet again that he has nothing to fear from the proud full sail of his adversary, nor in “that affable familiar ghost, which nightly gulls him with intelligence”; fear of him makes him neither dumb nor sick, only when his friend's favour prospered the verse of his rival, then lacked he matter, — that enfeebled his own.

Sonnet 87—95. That feeling of estrangement, which in this increasing jealousy we have seen taking possession of the poet's heart, appears consummated in the next epoch of the development of this union of the friends, and is coupled

with the deepest, most touching grief. Still the value of this love stands to him high above everything, but the fear, that his darling may suddenly wholly withdraw from him has grown to a certainty. The remembrance of the difference of his friend's rank rises again in the poet's soul with a bitter warning. Once, when he described this union with his friend, it had been with joyful confidence, even when concealed under elegiac laments; now it is with tragic despondency. He had earlier expressed (Sonn. 49.) that he had no ground, no right, no claim upon his love, but he did it so calmly, because himself incredulous, he exhibited only as a poetic imagination the case, which now is at hand as a reality. Notwithstanding he is so kind, so ready for resignation, that he permits his friend to add to his self-known unworthiness even invented faults, which can justify him in forsaking him. As soon as he knows his will, he will "acquaintance strangle, and look strange", he will be absent from his walks, and will banish from his tongue his sweet beloved name: "lest he, (too much profane) should do it wrong, and haply of their old acquaintance tell". In the 87th sonnet he writes him as it were a parting letter:

Farewell! thou art too dear for my possessing,
 And like enough thou know'st thy estimate:
 The charter of thy worth gives thee releasing;
 My bonds in thee are all determinate.
 For how do I hold thee but by thy granting?
 And for that riches where is my deserving?
 The cause of this fair gift in me is wanting,
 And so my patent back again is swerving.
 Thyself thou gav'st, thy own worth then not knowing,
 Or me, to whom thou gav'st it, else mistaking;
 So thy great gift, upon misprision growing,
 Comes home again, on better judgment making.
 Thus have I had thee, as a dream doth flatter,
 In sleep a king, but waking, no such matter.

However resolute this letter of renunciation sounds, it was not so seriously intended. The strength of fidelity or the weakness of love leads him ever back again to the object, who rises above the power of his resignation, and stifles every feeling of self-reliance. He wallows deeper in the painful thoughts of this separation, and tears his wounds wider and wider asunder, nevertheless without being able to bleed to death. Misfortunes too meet him from without; he complains of the "spite of fortune". "Hate me when thou wilt", he writes in the 90th sonnet,

"if ever, now ;
 Now while the world is bent my deeds to cross,
 Join with the spite of fortune, make me bow,
 And do not drop in for an after-loss.
 Ah! do not, when my heart hath 'scaped *this* sorrow,
 Come in the rearward of a conquer'd woe ;
 Give not a windy night a rainy morrow,
 'To linger out a purpos'd overthrow."
 If thou wilt leave me, do not leave me last,
 When other petty griefs have done their spite,
 But in the onset come : so shall I taste
 At first the very worst of fortune's might".

Even this degree of pain at wounded affection and self-love, is not the worst. He fears even that his love may be false, and he, the lover, know it not. His looks may be with him, his heart in another place. He seems in sonnet 94, to doubt, whether he shall reckon him among those dangerous superior natures "that do not do the thing they most do show", who misuse the privilege they possess to cover every blot with beauty's veil; who are lords and owners of their faces; who move others, while they are themselves as stone, unmoved, cold, and slow to temptation. He fears that he might have lavished his heart laden with rich treasure upon cold superficial vanity, and no more painful experience

could have befallen the man, who had staked so much pure love and fidelity upon this one friend.

Sonnets 100—126. But a happier destiny spared our poet this bitter experience. It had certainly come to this, that a neglect on the part of the noble friend was followed by a corresponding neglect on the part of the poet, that a cooling of the first love, an estrangement between the two had arisen, that a shadow had fallen on the union which had begun with so much promise. But it also happened that these shadows dispersed, that the equal fault of both counter-balanced and neutralized each other. The 120th sonnet clearly sets forth the circumstances which the whole of the last group allows us to conjecture. It "befriends" the poet, that his friend was once unkind, for now when the sky is again serene above them, every word in this last series of sonnets proclaims, that their union now for the first time stands above the reach of caprice, that full contentment has returned, that

"ruined love, when it is built anew,
Grows fairer than at first, more strong, far greater".

The poet now accuses himself, that he had alienated himself from his friend, that he had neglected his "dear purchased right", and had for a time slumbered in his love. He looks back upon the three years past, when their love was new, and he celebrated its spring;

"Then I was wont to greet it with my lays;
As Philomel in summer's front doth sing,
And stops his pipe in growth of riper days:
Not that the summer is less pleasant now,
Than when her mournful hymns did hush the night,
But that wild music burdens every bough,
And sweets, grown common, lose their dear delight.
Therefore like her, I sometime hold my tongue,
Because I would not dull you with my song".

His silence and his absence thus began with that song of the new favourites, with the divided favour of his friend, with the jealousy which disburdened itself in those outbursts of inward pain, when the poet looked now backward to the old times, now forward to the day when he should see his darling completely separated from him. Now pathetically he calls upon his muse to begin anew the interrupted song, to celebrate again the old idolatrous worship of his love, to survey the sweet face of his friend, "if time have any wrinkles graven there". He finds that he has "by waning grown", and seems to hold in his power "time's fickle glass, his sickle". His song goes on with the old praise upon the excellence of his friend, and extols the poet's love as "strengthened, though more weak in seeming". He triumphs that neither his own fears, nor the prophetic soul of the wide world could control the lease of his true love. The moon has endured her eclipse, the sad augurs mock their own presage, and peace proclaims olives of endless age; with the drops of this most balmy time, his love looks fresh. The poet acknowledges anew the moral errors, to which he was exposed, but he asserts "by all above", that these "blenches gave his heart another youth". Yet once more he casts a glance upon the stigma "which vulgar scandal stamped upon his brow", but he feels now for ever assured, that his friend's love and pity will efface the impression. Even this last matter which depressed him, he seems to cast aside with lighter heart in new confidence in the duration of their friendship. "What care I", he says in the 112th sonnet,

"who calls me well or ill,
So you o'ergreen my bad, my good allow?"

You are my all-the-world, and I must strive
 To know my shames and praises from your tongue ;
 None else to me, nor I to none alive,
 That my steel'd sense or changes, right or wrong.
 In so profound abysm I throw all care
 Of others' voices, that my adder's sense
 To critic and to flatterer stopped are".

This then is the history of the origin and growth of this union of soul, as we read it in Shakespeare's sonnets. It is a connection, in itself of no great importance, nay, in the way in which it is poetically expressed, it is not without distortion. But it testifies in our poet to a strength of feeling and passion, to a childlike nature and a candid mind, to a simple ingenuousness, to a perfect inability to veil his thoughts or to dissemble, to an innate capacity for allowing circumstances to act upon his mind in all their force and for re-acting upon them, — in a word it testifies to a nature so truthful, so genuine and straight-forward, such as we imagine the poet from his dramatic works throughout to have possessed. The sonnets represent the psychologically connected, undivided course of an occurrence of his inner life, which could not easily extend over a space of three years; the internal evidence upon the matter speaks thus for the complete accomplishment of the whole series within the time admitted by us. For the more accurate characterization of the youth, of whom they treat, we learn little or nothing in the whole series of poems. The bad form of the sonnet prevents us indeed from gleaning much from these poems as to the nature of his friend; and moreover at the age, which we imagine the young man to have reached, the character is first established and formed. If we once again admit the conjecture advanced, that Shakespeare's favourite was the

Earl of Southampton, the few traits which we can lay hold of, tally exactly. That the Earl was a man of fine powers of mind, affected with all the excitement for the young art of that inquisitive age, as the sonnets so appropriately designate it, that he was a patron of all poets and scholars, is well known. That he was a man of refined manners, of a liberal nature, capable of surmounting class-prejudice in a manner unusual at that time, and of extending his hand, heedless of his position, to an amiable man like Shakespeare, we know partly from his avowed connection with Shakespeare, and partly from what we gather from touches in the history of his life. He possessed a disposition of free independence and defiant self-will, little in harmony with the absolute age of Elizabeth and James; he had married Eliza Vernon against the will of the Queen; in 1601, he was involved in the conspiracy of the Earl of Essex, a frivolous bold undertaking, testifying to the infatuated self-confidence of its instigator. He was known to be in other instances also of fiery temperament and ready for dispute; even under James both in parliament and in privy council he was on the side of the opposition, popular, and averse to all feeble-hearted policy. Thus probably, we should think, must that man have been qualified, thus must he have been endowed by nature, who from his earliest youth could win so great an affection from Shakespeare.

In the foregoing analysis of the sonnets we have only advanced that which concerns the connection between the two friends. Still more important is the light thrown by them upon the circumstances and inward life of Shakespeare himself. We find our poet, however elegiac is the colouring of his mind in the sonnets, in the fresh bloom of

prosperity. In the years 1593—1594, his narrative poems first gained for him notice in the best circles of society, they ranked him among the learned, and the name of Southampton, to whom they were dedicated, was their protection and recommendation. Thomas Nash would have anticipated a greater poet in Shakespeare, had he continued to write in the Italian style, and relinquished his dramatic vocation. Richard Barnfield in his "Encomion of Lady Pecunia", (1598.) places the poet "in Fame's immortal book", on account of his honey-flowing vein in Venus and Lucrece, without any mention of his plays, whilst at the same time Meres applies to these poems, and to his dramas equally, Horace's *exegi monumentum*. From this acknowledged praise, the happy self-reliance of the poet, expressed in the sonnets, may be well explained. Throughout it is moderated by genuine modesty; he calls his lines poor and rude compared to the products of the advancing age and of rapidly progressing poetry, he considers them nothing worth and "doing him disgrace"; but throughout these paroxysms of self-dissatisfaction, there passes that confidence with which he so often reminds his friend, that the earth can yield him but a common grave, while he shall lie "entombed in men's eyes". This happy state of things which we detect in his inward feelings, we find also in his outward relations at this time, and if we may credit the report of that munificent gift of Southampton's, this state was also suddenly determined by the favour of this friend. Shakespeare's father had in 1578, in a time of need, mortgaged the landed property of his wife, called Ashbies, to Edmund Lambert, for £40, a small estate of 65 acres of land, which was well worth three times that sum. The mortgager was again to be put

in possession, if on or before Michaelmas-day 1580, the money borrowed was repaid. This took place; but the estate was withheld under the pretext, that other debts owed by the old Shakespeare to Lambert must be first discharged. The Lamberts had large connections; the old Shakespeare on the contrary speaks of himself in his bill of complaint in 1597, as "of small wealth and very few friends and alliance". It was in this year that he first ventured to complain, as now for the first time he seems to have had the means to support his cause. Such slight notices occur several times, as the prosperity of the family rose. At the period of the great dearth of 1597, there is a register of the corn then in the town of Stratford; in the list John Shakespeare is not mentioned at all, probably because he lived in the house of his son, who gladly laid out his wealth in his paternal city; William Shakespeare is registered for 10 quarters, comparatively a large quantity. In the year 1598, Shakespeare possesses one of the best houses in the best part of Stratford, known as "the great house" or "New Place". In the years 1601—1603 we know that he bought three different pieces of land in his paternal city, and in 1605, he made his largest known gain in the purchase of the unexpired term of a long lease of the great and small tithes in Stratford, Old Stratford, Bishopton, and Welcom, for £. 440. in cash. From 1597, we find him continually occupied in this manner in financial and economical affairs, which testify to an increasing prosperity. Collier finally reckons his income at £. 400. a year. In the diary of Mr. John Ward of Stratford, whose memoranda extend from 1648 to 1679, it is even stated that he had heard that Shakespeare in his elder days spent at the rate of £. 1000.

a year, a proof at least that he had the reputation of being a very rich man.

In the first intoxication of his youthful success, Shakespeare, it appears, continued his dissolute life, which he had indulged in at Stratford. His connection with that vicious yet attractive woman exhibits him to us as a prey to a common passion. The poet finds his friend surrounded by dangerous company; he winks at first at his youthful errors, because he knows there is good in him at the core; yet he subsequently fears the pressure of repeated temptation. He fears the results of slander, deadening the sensibility to reputation, he reproves the too great affability and condescension of his favourite. And just so, as he blames the youthful manners of his friend, the poet also looks back reprovingly upon his own past conduct. He acknowledges concealed faults, wherein he is attainted; he speaks of self-love as "grounded inward" in his heart, and of affection as an "old offence"; he accuses himself of a "bewailed guilt", which may do shame to his friend; if this friend ever should find cause to slight him, he will on his side "ensconce" himself within the knowledge of his own desert, and uprear his hand against himself. We know not what definite guilt it was, which thus pressed heavily upon Shakespeare and which he had to bewail, yet we do know enough from his life, to be able at all events to refer to this expression; and it serves to animate the picture, which we like to form of the poet, if we rely upon any tangible evidence, with full readiness to relinquish it again upon better information. But that which depressed the poet far more than his actions, was his rank; indeed it is conceivable that the faults and defects, which he sees attached to him-

self, were for the most part only those undeserved ones, which that age linked to the position of an actor; possibly indeed even those which were deserved, were such as life in this position and the continual allurements of fancy only too readily induced. Nothing is more touching, than the sight of a mind so great, standing superior as it does to the prejudices of *all* ages, and yet almost succumbing under the weight of this depressing popular feeling. In sonnet 111, he writes to the friendly nobleman:

“O! for my sake do you with fortune chide,
 The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,
 That did not better for my life provide
 Than public means, which public manners breeds;
 Thence comes it that my name receives a brand;
 And almost thence my nature is subdued
 To what it works in, like the dyer's hand.
 Pity me then, and wish *I were renew'd*,
 Whilst, like a willing patient, I will drink
 Potions of eysel 'gainst my strong infection;
 No bitterness that I will bitter think;
 Nor double penance, to correct correction”.

The metamorphosis, after which the poet sighs, the *renewation* of his being, we see from a few intimations, especially in the last group of our sonnets, passing, as it seems, before us. The renewal, after which he aspired, can in different ways be understood and interpreted. In his outward career it is very remarkable, that at the period of the origin of these sonnets, the first steps occur, in which Shakespeare endeavoured to raise himself above his position, to enter the rank of the gentry, to advance in consideration and esteem by increasing his worldly possessions. The great man evidently did not escape this weakness any more than his colleague Alleyn, who even aspired to

nobility. The history of the step, which he took for this object, is strange enough. It had been affirmed long ago, that John Shakespeare, William's father, had received permission to bear a coat of arms; but no such patent exists. There is indeed a confirmation of such a right in 1596, but very probably this was solicited by our poet himself, and not by his father. This document mentions, that the heralds had been "by credible report informed", that "the parents and late antecessors" of John Shakespeare had been advanced and rewarded for their services to Henry VII., no trace of which, however, is to be found in the archives of the period; unless this statement refer to the Ardens, who were certainly the "antecessors" of William Shakespeare, but not of John, and who certainly received favour and promotion from Henry VII. In 1599, an exemplification of arms was procured, in which it was stated, that the "great grandfather" of John Shakespeare had been rewarded with lands and tenements by Henry VII.; this was the case with William's great grandfather by his mother's side, but not with John's. The poet-actor, who from his profession could not have claimed a grant of arms, put forward his father's name, as having been bailiff and "justice of the peace", and coupled that fact with the deserts of his own maternal ancestors. It is an authentic fact, that Sir William Dethick, who was Garter-king-at-arms in 1596 and 1599, was called to account for having forged pedigrees and granted coats to persons, whose circumstances and station in society gave them no right to the distinction; the case of John Shakespeare was expressly charged against him. The artifices, which Shakespeare employed in taking this step, sufficiently show of what importance

the matter was to him. However, all these measures for the elevation of his outward rank seem to receive their true light only from the determination, with which Shakespeare strove as early as possible to escape from his position as an actor. It appears beyond a doubt, that soon after the accession of king James to the throne in 1603, at which period he acted in Ben Jonson's *Sejanus*, he completely retired from the stage and lived first in London and subsequently at Stratford as a dramatic poet alone. No one will surely blame Shakespeare for this step. For we must remember how far the contempt of this position extended, how absolute was the magisterial power against it, in order to understand how a free spirit could all the less patiently bear this oppression, the greater the enthusiasm was for the art and the liberty of the stage. In 1581, Elizabeth, in spite of all her royal favour towards the stage, had given authority to Tylney, the master of the revels, to compel into her service at their pleasure the actors and dramatic poets of every company, or to cast them into prison! To see art thus "made tongue-tied by authority" and "strength by limping sway disabled", drew those life-weary sighs from the poet in his sonnets, even in his prime. Who could blame him, that he felt the ignominy of such a condition beyond others, when once by his intercourse with his patron, he had gone hand in hand with honour and respect, which seemed spotless in the eyes of the world? If at the present day of class-levelling, disregarding the custom of other ages, we are inclined to think unjustly upon the steps that Shakespeare took to raise himself outwardly above his position, we may with all the greater satisfaction linger upon the strength of soul, with which he strove to

soar beyond the reach of prejudice. That this was for him an actual, great, inner struggle, we comprehend not so easily, from the nature of the age, in which we live; nevertheless, this is a fact undoubtedly confirmed by the deeply impressive handling of the questions upon the prejudices of position and birth, which we have observed in the dramas of this period, and by what we have just read in the sonnets. In these poems, as often as the poet dwells upon the difference of rank between the two friends, and in especial upon his own social position, the prevailing tone is resignation, the humble feeling of unworthiness and of degradation, the readiness to renounce, to bear alone the dishonour of his profession, and the stains which were attached to it, to yield his right to his noble friend, of knowing him no more, of disowning him. Only sometimes does the poet rise to that self-reliance, which makes him disregard this prejudice, of the oppressive existence of which every hour reminded him, and to overcome which therefore demanded no little power. And truly in those passages and always in elevated poetic language, the elevated strength of the inner resolve lies excellently expressed. We have heard them above, — those passages, in which he, rousing himself from the thoughts of self-contempt, draws such joyfulness from the remembrance of his friend, as to "scorn to change his state with kings." And those others, in which he, seeing in his friend his whole world, disregards the fame of others, and throws all care of others' voices into the profoundest abyss. But with this self-reliance with regard to his social position, a still more thorough renewal appears to have been linked. In the most different passages of the later sonnets, where a more serious mood has seized him,

he glances upon his past conduct with the severity of fresh austerity, he holds before his eyes a mirror, in which he reads an unworthiness not depending upon his position, and he exonerates himself from it, if we may believe the most solemn words of such a truthful man, by the prejudice, that a moral stain must of necessity cling to his position. In the 110th sonnet he says:

“Alas! ’tis true, I have gone here and there,
 And made myself a motley to the view;
 Gored mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear,
 Made old offences of affections new;
 Most true it is that I have look’d on truth
 Askance and strangely; but, by all above,
 These blenches gave my heart another youth”.

Is it not as if Prince Henry looked back upon his wild days, which were to him a time of trial, blunting the growth of strong passion? We Germans, in the lives of our own Goethe and Schiller can point out the fruitful periods, in which these men so highly gifted, and equally endowed for evil, after having been carried away by youthful affections and excesses, recovered again the germs of good within them, and returned to the seriousness of life and to the dignity of morality: we may also believe, that in Shakespeare there was such a metamorphosis of moral purification and transformation, which in a man so richly gifted is, perhaps more than we should think, a necessity, a stage of development and progress, to be observed in all striving and deeply impassioned natures.

Not rarely has the conjecture been expressed, that Shakespeare indeed conferred upon Prince Henry many essential qualities of his own nature. If this were decided, we should have a sure and tangible point of connection,

uniting his life with his poetry ; and proving between the two the most intimate relation, which would afford us a definite idea of the character and intellectual stature of our friend ; and it would be a point of connection of such an important kind, that it would at once spare us any further search after separate scattered references between Shakespeare's life and writings. Now if we see with what fervour, love, and depth, the poet has planned and executed the character of Prince Henry, we shall be inclined even upon this one ground, to consider this conjecture at least more closely. But we know enough from Shakespeare's life, and we have besides in his writings abundant points of comparison, which justify this supposition not a little. He too had been carried away in his life with wild and unrestrained companions ; he had felt uncomfortable at home from an unhappy marriage ; he followed a degraded profession, one even in his own opinion degrading ; he looked back repentantly as we saw above, upon the faults of an impassioned nature, and struggled to shake them off. We should readily believe of the poet of the Venus and of that last series of sonnets, even without the slight intimations of biographical documents, that for a long while he had wandered in the mazes of love. But if in the sonnets we have observed the affectionate nature, which in connection with his young friend passed so deeply and thoughtfully through that trifling but pure inner life, insignificant as it might be, we shall understand further that the same poet rose to the praise-worthy glorification of the passion of love in Romeo and Juliet, aye, that he found precedents within for the sources of that jealousy of an outcast, which he subsequently depicted in Othello with such fearful truth ;

we see from these poems as well as from the circumstances of life indicated by the sonnets, a nature in which so great was the fermentation of passion, that purification was inevitable. If the poet speaks the truth to us in the passage quoted, that "the blenches gave his heart another youth", than his own sentence applies to himself: "best men are moulded out of faults; and for the most, become much more the better for being a little bad"; thus he has himself, like his Prince Henry, given proof that that is a fruitful field, in which, while untilled, the weed grows most luxuriantly, and that

"Wholesome berries thrive and ripen best,
Neighbour'd by fruit of baser quality".

This inner purification, according to the sonnets, derived its impetus from intercourse with his noble friend. As his Prince Henry in a higher sphere of life descended to nature and plain simplicity, so he, in his lower outcast existence aspired to nobler habits and to a more honourable position; by a reverse way he arrived at the knowledge of the higher and lower strata of society, weighed their worth, and sucked in their advantages, and attained to that full, complete view of human nature, which we admire in the poet, and which he has imparted to his Prince Henry. If the friendship with that noble youth existed as closely and ardently as we assume; and was cemented at the period, in which Shakespeare dedicated his *Lucrece* to the Earl of Southampton in 1594, we understand all the better, why the poet at this very time wrote that poem of friendship, the *Merchant of Venice*, and we call to mind that it was about the same sum, which the princely merchant lent to the adventurer Bassanio for his prosperous journey, that Southampton gave

to our poet for his share in the Globe, for *his* expedition to the Golden Fleece. If the poet, so inferior in birth, felt himself indeed so blessed, as the sonnets tell us, in that friendship, in which his intellectual worth balanced the inequality of outward position, we understand all the better, why he, again at this very time, wrote the history of that poor Helena, and why with so much emphasis he depicts the circumstances, when

"The mightiest space in fortune nature brings
To join like likes, and kiss like native things".

We understand now also, why the common kernel of so many of his plays of this period lay in the ever repeated precept, that true nobility was alone that of virtue and merit, why the spirit of all Shakespearian poetry of this period expressed so forcibly an aversion to all show, to all glitter, and false ornament. All the thousand reflections upon the character and worth of men, upon real merit and imaginary nobility, may be referred, we see, to the one great emotion which engrossed Shakespeare at this period, to that connection with his friend, and to his variance with his position, to that remarkable inner conflict, in which he strove to overcome the prejudices of the world. We have seen, that it *was* a severe conflict within him, which he endured not passively with cold heroism, but in which he rather sustained defeat in hours of weakness; we understand, therefore, that for years long his soul was agitated by it, and that this conflict thus profoundly expressed itself in his writings of this period. If turning from this profound employment of his poetry in contrasting show and reality, we argue back again to the characteristics of his life, we under-

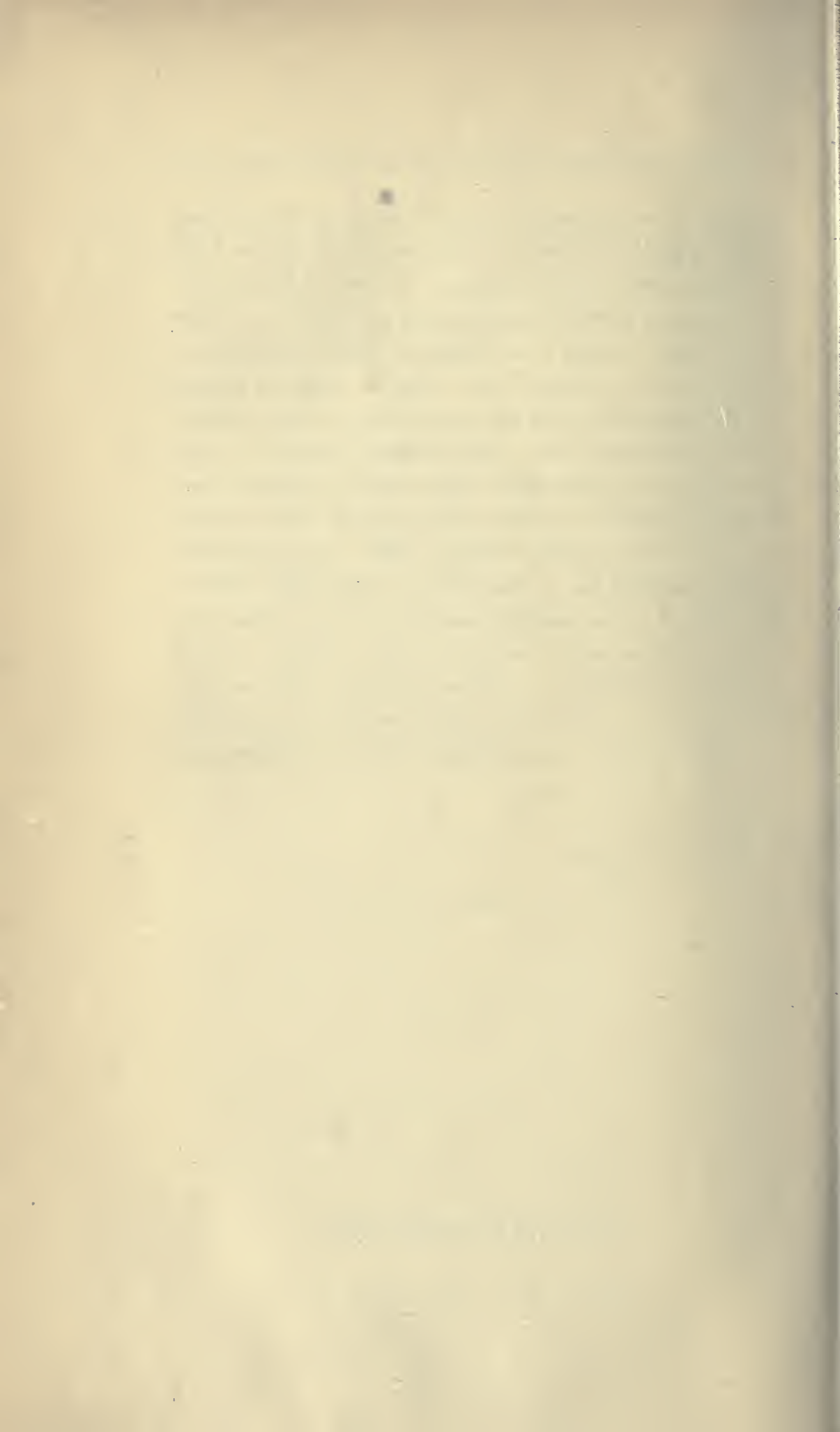
stand better, why the poet was so deeply averse to his position as an actor, and finally renounced it: for this art makes show its very business. Taking all together, we think we perceive a certain necessity that the poet's greatest designs in the very period of these inward emotions, should have culminated in such creations as the Merchant of Venice and in such a character as Prince Henry. For how readily must he have mirrored himself in a being, whom he placed upon that highest point, at which it becomes possible to a man to cast from him that last prejudice, — that namely, of minding prejudice more than is necessary; of not estimating the appearance of evil, when he is conscious of a good object; of not striving after the appearance of good, when the good deed is accomplished, and of being satisfied with the self-consciousness, that needs not outward praise and recompense, and cares not for outward blame and injury.

Well may we, therefore, believe, that just in the most essential respects, the character of our poet was reflected in Prince Henry, that he perceived, in the meagre outlines of the chronicle, a frame in which he could insert the picture of his own nature. A strong evidence of this we certainly cannot give. But there is one consideration which is of more weight in this respect, than all written documents. A character of this simple and admirable kind and of a nobility so noiseless and so deeply seated, could only be depicted by the poet from the experiences of his own life and being. The traits of hypocrisy and frivolity, of warlike ambition and thirst for glory, of avarice and of extravagance, the furrows which the sharp ploughshare of love or jealousy makes in the heart, these a clever and experienced man can gather from the men around him, even if in his own

temperament he entertains but little of them. But the quiet virtue of extreme humility, the resignation of self-consciousness, the contempt of show, these are qualities, which are seldom presumed in other men, and are with difficulty fathomed to their source; in such a manner as in Henry IV., unless the observer possesses himself a measure of the rare virtue, and knows its traits from acquaintance with his own soul. Easily can we gather from Shakespeare's life and writings some such traits, which offer a parallel between him and the Prince; but far more important for this parallel is it, if we compare with the whole nature of this his favourite, the whole impression of his works, in which his character stands written in bolder outline. All which characterizes these works and their origin most strikingly, may be referred to this same fundamental principle, upon which he formed the nature of his Prince. His art as well as his moral wisdom breathes throughout the same unvarnished truth, as that with which he invested his hero; the same contempt of all traditionary rules, conscious that without rules he could hit the measure of the beautiful and the good; the same principle of comprehending life in all its completeness and in all its varieties. Just as in Henry's nature so in Shakespeare's also, all that can be called show, gloss, or false ostentation, is, as if intentionally, cast aside; and as for the eye of the ordinary reader, the royal Henry withdrew unnoticed and unattractively into his modest retirement, so for centuries after Shakespeare did the jewel in his works lie hidden. Deceived by the appearance of disorder, they saw barbarisms where the highest art had ruled, and coarse morality where the purest nobility of mind and a tried

standom taught the severest laws of moral life. Void of splendour as was the progress of the immediate influence of Shakespeare's splendid works, was their entrance also to the world. When Shakespeare disdained to make himself longer "a motley to the view", when he withdrew from the stage to his poetry, this also was an involuntary step, in harmony with the profound bias of his nature from show to reality. Previous to him, we may say, the poet was in the pay of the actor, the kernel of the art was not freed from the shell; but since Shakespeare gave to dramatic poetry an independent value, the perishable dramatic art became subject to the poetic, and form was vanquished in the service of mind. But for this he placed no more value upon his works than the least of those who composed dramas before and with him; he cared little for their printing, not at all for their collection and for their pure and genuine form. Modest and silent he gave this great bequest to the much agitated and distracted age, and as his own Prince Henry turned from his deeds of glory, he passed away from his works careless of fame. Yet to a still higher degree do we perceive that inmost characteristic of the poet, in obedience to which he pressed in the substance of all things after truth and pure nature, if we look at the whole relation in which his poetry stands to actual life, in comparison with the poetry of other ages and nations. Antiquity, in happy completeness of life, knew not of the contrast between nature and conventionality; the middle ages first brought in with the extravagance of spirit the deviation of life from the source of simple naturalness. The whole poetry of the age of chivalry was in unerring harmony with the conventional forms of the life of this period. The epos too of the Italians,

and the drama of the French and Spanish, went hand in hand with it. But Germanic art has not so simply placed its task before itself. It received not life in so orthodox a belief as it found it; excited by the spirit of Protestantism it established itself, in opposition to custom, when it had become an abuse of habit; the ideal lies in it, not as in southern art in refined forms, but in a retrospective glance upon an original purity of life, in the endeavour to give back to human relations and circumstances that truth and nature which had been lost amid the arbitrary rules of conventionality. This opposition between ideal art and real life, Shakespeare was the first in the Teutonic nations to denounce. His predecessors commenced it, but they fell into the opposite extreme of the coarsest nature; but *he* moderated this opposition with wise restraint; and by his mediation the German poetry of the last century received that position, in which it quickly proved itself so active.





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